THE ® saint

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JULY
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ICD

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Chief Mourner of Marne
by G. K. Chesterton

A Very Small Homicide
by Evan Hunter

Riddle of the Tired Bullet
by Stuart Palmer

The Man Who Knew Women
by Robert Bloch

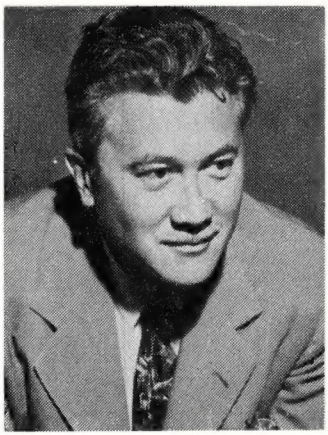
The Perfect Crime
by Leslie Charteris

ICE COLD MURDER

A NEW STORY by LAWRENCE TREAT

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



SECOND ONLY to the academic sport of fishing for evidence that Shakespeare's plays were actually written by Francis Bacon or Thomas Marlowe, the pedagogue's parlor game of straining the Sherlock Holmes canon for more detail about the Beagle of Baker Street than the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle consciously intended to record has amused so many more distinguished professionals and talented amateurs than any literary exercise of its kind that in fact one is hard pressed to think of any comparable subject to place third.

It has always seemed a pity to me that this kind of pleasantly futile effort was not spread over a wider field, because the Sherlock Holmes subject is not inexhaustible, after all, and meanwhile there are quite a few other lodes in which some entertaining prospecting might be done. Therefore it was a real moment of delighted discovery for me when in London last summer, thumbing through the usual crop of magazines while waiting for a haircut, I opened a copy of *Punch* and came upon R. G. G. Price's BEGINNER'S SLOPE, the first study in such a vein that I have seen devoted to G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown, a character whom I rate no less worthy of immortality than Holmes.

International negotiations for the right to reprint this scholarly diversion in a medium which may reach a few benighted detective story fans who do not read *Punch* having at last been successfully concluded, I am especially pleased to be able to offer it this month as an unusual preface to another Father Brown text, THE CHIEF MOURNER OF MARNE.

This doesn't mean that any editorial presbyopia limits our purview to antiquities, as should be evidenced by this month's lead story, Lawrence Treat's ICE COLD MURDER, which is as new as the latest refrigerator. Neither Holmes nor Brown had the involvements of this one to cope with in their relatively simple worlds. And for extra good measure on the contemporary side Robert Bloch's equally new THE MAN WHO KNEW WOMEN is, if I may stick my neck out, one of the neatest-plotted crime stories I have read in many moons.

Of course, we also go back to other classics like Stuart Palmer's Hildegard Withers in THE RIDDLE OF THE TIRED BULLET, and one of Simon Templar's notions of THE PERFECT CRIME. Nobody wrote a monograph on either of them yet, but we can dream, can't I?

Ellery Queen

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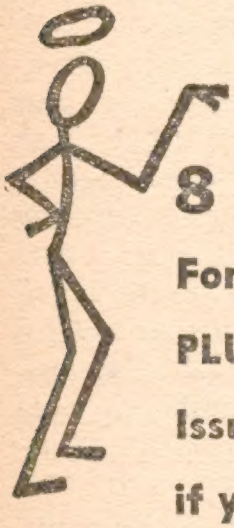

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the perfect crime

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Mr. Deever had an unerring nose for a likely victim. But so had the Saint . . .

"THE defendants," said Mr. Justice Goldie, with evident distaste, "have been unable to prove that the agreement between the plaintiff and the late Alfred Green constituted a moneylending transaction within the limits of the Act; and I am therefore obliged to give judgment for the plaintiff. I will consider the question of costs tomorrow."

The Saint tapped Peter Quentin on the shoulder as the court rose, and they slipped out ahead of the scanty assembly of spectators, bored reporters, dawdling solicitors, and traditionally learned counsel. Simon Templar had sat in that stuffy little room for two hours, bruising his marrowbones on an astonishingly hard wooden bench and yearning for a cigarette; but there were times when he could endure many discomforts in a good cause.

Outside, he caught Peter's arm.

"Mind if I take another look at our plaintiff?" he said. "Just over here—stand in front of me. I want to see what a snurge like that really looks like."

They stood in a gloomy corner near the door of the court, and Simon sheltered behind Peter

History and fiction alike are full of perfect crimes that misfired. The Saint was modestly sure he could do much better.

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER.
Copyright, 1933, by Leslie Charteris.

Quentin's hefty frame and watched James Deever come out with his solicitor.

It is possible that Mr. Deever's mother loved him. Perhaps, holding him on her knee, she saw in his childish face the fulfilment of all those precious hopes and shy incommunicable dreams which (if we can believe the *Little Mothers' Weekly*) are the joy and comfort of the prospective parent. History does not tell us that. But we do know that since her death, thirty years ago, no other bosom had ever opened to him with anything like that sublime mingling of pride and affection.

He was a long cadaverous man with a face like a vulture and shaggy white eyebrows over closely-set greenish eyes. His thin nose swooped low down over a thin gash of a mouth, and his chin was pointed and protruding. In no respect whatsoever was it the kind of countenance to which children take an instinctive shine. Grown men and women, who knew him, liked him even less.

His home and business address were in Manchester; but the City Corporation had never been heard to boast about it. Simon Templar watched him walk slowly past, discussing some point in the case he had just won with the air of a parson conferring with a churchwarden after matins, and the reeking hypocrisy of the performance filled him with an almost irresistible desire to catch Mr. Deever's frock-coated stern with the toe of his shoe and start him on one sudden magnificent flight to the foot of the stairs. The Manchester City Corporation, Simon considered, could probably have kept their ends up without Mr. Deever's name on the roll of ratepayers. But the Saint restrained himself, and went on peaceably with Peter Quentin five minutes afterwards.

"Let us drink some Old Curio," said the Saint.

They entered a convenient tavern, lighting cigarettes as they went, and found a secluded corner in the saloon bar. The court had sat on late, and the hour had struck at which it is lawful for Englishmen to consume the refreshment which can only be bought at any time of the day in uncivilized foreign countries.

And for a few minutes there was silence. . . .

"It's wonderful what you can do with the full sanction of the law," Peter Quentin said presently, in a rather sourly reflective tone; and the Saint smiled at him wryly. He knew that Peter was not thinking about the more obvious inanities of the English licensing laws.

"I rather wanted to get a good close-up of James, and watch him in action," he said. "I guess all the stories are true."

There were several stories

about James Deever; but none of them ever found their way into print—for libel actions mean heavy damages, and Mr. Deever sailed very comfortably within the law. His business was plainly and publicly that of a moneylender, and as a moneylender he was duly and legally registered according to the Act which had done so much to bring the profession of usury within certain humane restrictions.

And as a plain and registered moneylender Mr. Deever retained his offices in Manchester, superintending every detail of his business in person, trusting nobody, sending out beautifully-worded circulars in which he proclaimed his readiness to lend anybody any sum from £10 to £50,000 on note of hand alone, and growing many times richer than the Saint thought anyone but himself had any right to be. Nevertheless, Mr. Deever's business would probably have escaped the Saint's attentions if those few facts had covered the whole general principle of it.

They didn't. Mr. Deever, who, in spite of the tenor of his artistically-printed circulars, was not in the moneylending business on account of any urge to go down to mythology as the little fairy godmother of Manchester, had devised half a dozen ingenious and strictly legal methods of evading the limitations placed on him by the Act. The prospective borrower who came to him, full of faith and hope, for the loan of £10 to £50,000 was frequently accommodated—not, one must admit, on his note of hand alone, but eventually on the basis of some very sound security. And if the loan were promptly repaid, there the matter ended—at the statutory rate of interest for such transactions. It was only when the borrower found himself in further difficulties that Mr. Deever's ingenious schemes came into operation. It was then that the victim found himself straying little by little into a maze of complicated mortgages, discounted checks, "nominal" promissory notes, mysterious "conversions," and technically-worded transfers —straying into that labyrinth so gradually at first that it all seemed quite harmless, slipping deeper into it over an easy path of documents and signatures, floundering about in it at last and losing his bearings more and more hopelessly in his struggles to climb back—finally awakening to the haggard realization that by some incomprehensible jugglery of papers and figures he owed Mr. Deever five or six times as much money as Mr. Deever had given him in cash, and having it proved to him over his own signature that there was no question of the statutory rate of interest having been exceeded at any time.

Exactly thus had it been proved

to the widow of a certain victim in the case that they had listened to that afternoon; and there were other similar cases that had come to the Saint's receptive knowledge.

"There were days," remarked the Saint, rather wistfully, "when some lads of the village and I would have carved Brother Deever into small pieces and baited lobster-pots with him from the North Foreland to the Lizard."

"And what now?" queried Peter Quentin.

"Now," said the Saint, regretfully, "we can only call on him for a large involuntary contribution to our Pension Fund for Deserving Outlaws."

Peter lowered the first quarter of his second highball.

"It'll have to be something pretty smart to catch that bird," he said. "If you asked me, I should say you couldn't take any story to him that wouldn't have to pass under a microscope."

"For which reason," murmured Simon Templar, with the utmost gravity, "I shall go to him with a story that is absolutely true. I shall approach him with a hook and line that the cleverest detective on earth couldn't criticize. You're right, Peter—there probably isn't a swindle in the encyclopedia that would get a yard past Brother James.

"It's a good thing we aren't criminals, Pete—we might get our fingers burned. No, laddie. Full of righteousness and good Scotch, we shall draw nigh to Brother James with our haloes fairly glistening. It was just for a man like him that I was saving up my Perfect Crime."

If the Saint's halo was not actually visibly luminous when he called at Mr. Deever's offices the next morning, he at least looked remarkably harmless. A white flower ("for purity," said the Saint) started in his button-hole and flowed in all directions over his coat lapel; a monocle was screwed into his right eye; his hat sat precariously on the back of his head; and his face was relaxed into an expression of such amiably aristocratic idiocy that Mr. Deever's chief clerk—a man hardly less sour-visaged than Mr. Deever himself—was even more obsequious than usual.

Simon said he wanted a hundred pounds, and would cheerfully give a jolly old note of hand for it if some johnnie would explain to him what a jolly old note of hand was. The clerk explained, oleaginously, that a jolly old note of hand was a somewhat peculiar sort of thing that sounded nice in advertisements, but wasn't really used with important clients. Had Mr. —er—Smith?—had Mr. Smith any other kind of security?"

"I've got some jolly old premium bonds," said the Saint; and the clerk nodded his head in a perfect sea of oil.

"If you can wait a moment, sir, perhaps Mr. Deever will see you himself."

The Saint had no doubt that Mr. Deever would see him. He waited around patiently for a few minutes, and was ushered into Mr. Deever's private sanctum.

"You see, I lost a bally packet at Derby yesterday—every blinkin' horse fell down dead when I backed it. I work a system, but of course you can't back a winner every day. I know I'll get it back, though—the chappie who sold me the system said it never let him down."

Mr. Deever's eyes gleamed. If there was anything that satisfied every one of his requirements for a successful loan, it was an asinine young man with a monocle who believed in racing systems.

"I believe you mentioned some security, Mr.—er—Smith. Naturally we should be happy to lend you a hundred pounds without any formalities, but—"

"Oh, I've got these jolly old bonds. I don't want to sell 'em, because they're having a draw this month. If you hold the lucky number you get a fat bonus. Sort of lottery business, but quite gilt-edged an' all that sort of thing."

He produced a large envelope, and passed it across Mr. Deever's desk. Deever extracted a bunch of expensively water-marked papers artistically engraved with green and gold lettering which proclaimed them to be Latvian 1929 Premium Loan (British Series) Bonds, value £25 each.

The financier crunched them between his fingers, squinted at the ornate characters suspiciously through a magnifying glass, and looked again at the Saint.

"Of course, Mr. Smith, we don't keep large sums of money on the premises. But if you like to leave these bonds with me until, say, two o'clock this afternoon, I'm sure we can make a satisfactory arrangement."

"Keep 'em by every manner of means, old bean," said the Saint airily. "So long as I get the jolly old quidlets in time to take 'em down to the three-thirty today, you're welcome."

Conveniently enough, this happened to be the first day of the Manchester September meeting. Simon Templar paraded again at two o'clock, collected his hundred pounds, and rejoined Peter Quentin at their hotel.

"I have a hundred pounds of Brother James's money," he announced. "Let's go and spread it around on the most frantic outsiders we can find."

They went to the races, and it so happened that the Saint's luck was in. He had doubled Mr. Deever's hundred pounds when the result of the last race went up on the board—but Mr. Deever would not have been seriously troubled if he had lost the lot. Five hundred pounds' worth of Latvian Bearer Bonds had been

deposited as security for the advance, and in spite of the artistic engraving on them there was no doubt that they were genuine. The interval between Simon Templar's visit to Mr. Deever in the morning and the time when the money was actually paid over to him had been devoted to an expert scrutiny of the bonds, coupled with inquiries at Mr. Deever's brokers, which had definitely established their authenticity—and the Saint knew it.

"I wonder," Simon Templar was saying as they drove back into the town, "if there's any place here where you could buy a false beard. With all this money in our pockets, why should you wait for Nature to grow it?"

Nevertheless, it was not with the air of a man who has collected a hundred pounds over a couple of well-chosen winners that the Saint came to Mr. Deever the next day. It was Saturday, but that meant nothing to Mr. Deever. He was a man who kept only the barest minimum of holidays and much good business might be done with temporarily embarrassed members of the racing fraternity on the second day of the meeting.

It appeared very likely on this occasion.

"I don't know how the horse managed to lose," said the Saint mournfully.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Deever unctuously. "Dear me! Did it lose?"

The Saint nodded.

"I don't understand it at all. The chappie who sold me this system said it had never had more than three losers in succession. And the stakes go up so frightfully fast. You see, you have to put on more money each time, so that when you win you get back your losses as well. But it simply must win today—"

"How much do you need to put on today, Mr. Smith?"

"About eight hundred pounds. But what with buzzing around an' having a few drinks and what not, don't you know—if you could make it an even thou—"

Mr. Deever rubbed his hands over each other with a face of abysmal gloom.

"A thousand pounds is quite a lot of money, Mr.—er—Smith, but of course, if you can offer some security — purely as a business formality, you understand—"

"Oh, I've got lots of those jolly old Latvian Bonds," said the Saint. "I think I bought about two hundred of 'em. Got to try and pick up a bonus somehow, what?"

Mr. Deever nodded like a mandarin.

"Of course, Mr. Smith. Of course. And it just happens that one of our advances was repaid today, so I may be able to find a thousand pounds for you in our

safe." He pressed a bell on his desk, and a clerk appeared. "Mr. Goldberg, will you see if we can oblige this gentleman with a thousand pounds?"

The clerk disappeared again, and came back in a few moments with a sheaf of bank-notes. Simon Templar produced another large envelope, and Mr. Deever drew from it an even thicker wad of bonds. He counted them over and examined them carefully one by one; then he took a printed form from a drawer, and unscrewed the cap of a Woolworth fountain-pen.

"Now if you will just complete our usual agreement, Mr. Smith—"

Through the glass partition that divided Mr. Deever's sanctum from the outer office there suddenly arose the expostulations of an extraordinarily loud voice. Raised in a particularly raucous north-country accent, it made itself heard so clearly that there was no chance of missing anything it said.

"I tell you, I'd know that maan anywhere. I'd know 'im in a daark room if I was blind-fooaled. It *was* Simon Templar, I tell you. I saw 'im coom in, an' I says to myself, 'Thaat's Saaint, thaat is.' I 'aad wife an' loogage with me, so I taakes 'em into 'otel 'an cooms straaight baack. I'm going to see thaat Saaint if I waait here two years—"

The buttery voice of Mr. Goldberg could be heard protesting. Then the north-country voice drowned it again.

"Then if you won't let me in, I'll go straaight out an' fetch policeman. Thaat's what I'll do."

There was an eruption without, as of someone departing violently into the street; and the Saint looked at Mr. Deever. Simon's hand was outstretched to grasp the pile of bank-notes—then he saw Deever's right hand come out of a drawer, and a nickel-plated revolver with it.

"Just a moment, Mr.—er—Smith," Deever said slowly. "I think you're in too much of a hurry."

He touched the bell on his desk again. Mr. Goldberg reappeared, mopping his swarthy brow. There was a glitter in Deever's greenish eyes which told Simon that the revolver was not there merely for the purposes of intimidation. The Saint sat quite still.

"Look in this gentleman's pockets, Mr. Goldberg. Perhaps he has some evidence of identity on him."

The clerk came over and began a search. The monocle had vanished from the Saint's right eye, and the expression on his face was anything but vacuous.

"You filthy miser!" he blazed. "I'll see that you're sorry for this. No one has ever insulted me like this for years—"

Coolly Deever leaned over the

desk and smacked Simon over the mouth. The blow cut the Saint's lip.

"A crook should be careful of his tongue," Deever said.

"There's a letter here, Mr. Deever," said the clerk, laying it on the blotter. "It's addressed to Simon Templar. And I found this as well."

"This" was another large envelope, the exact replica of the one in which Simon had handed over his Latvian Bonds. Deever opened it, and found that it contained a similar set of bonds; and when he had counted them he found that they were equal in number to those which he had accepted for security.

"I see — Mr. — er — Smith." The close-set eyes gloated. "So I've been considered worthy of the attentions of the famous Saint. And a very pretty swindle, too. First you borrow money on some genuine bonds; then you come back and try to borrow more money on some more genuine bonds—but when I'm not looking you exchange them for forgeries. Very neat, Mr. Templar. It's a pity that man outside recognized you. Mr. Goldberg, I think you might telephone for the police."

"You'll be sorry for this," said the Saint more calmly, with his eyes on Deever's revolver.

A police inspector arrived in a few minutes. He inspected the two envelopes, and nodded.

"That's an old trick, Mr. Deever," he said. "It's lucky that you were warned. Come along, you—put your hands out."

Simon looked down at the handcuffs.

"You don't need those," he said.

"I've heard about you," said the inspector grimly, "and I think we do. Come on, now, and no nonsense."

For the first time in his life Simon felt the cold embrace of steel on his wrists. A constable put his hat on for him, and he was marched out into the street. A small crowd had collected outside, and already the rumor of his identity was passing from mouth to mouth.

The local inspector did not spare him. Simon Templar was a celebrity, a capture that every officer in England had once dreamed of making, even if of late it had been found impossible to link his name with any proven crimes; and once arrested he was an exhibit to be proud of. The police station was not far away, and the Saint was compelled to walk to it, with his manacled wrists chained to the burly constable on his left and the inspector striding on his right.

He was charged with attempting to obtain money under false pretences; and when it was all written down they asked him if he had anything to say.

"Only that my right sock is

wearing a bit thin at the heel," answered the Saint. "D'you think someone could beetle along to my hotel and dig out a new pair?"

He was locked in a cell to be brought before the magistrate on the following Monday. It was Simon Templar's third experience of that, but he enjoyed it no more than the first time.

During Sunday he had one consolation. He was able to divert himself with thoughts of what he could do with about ten thousand pounds.

Monday morning brought a visitor to Manchester in the portly shape of Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, who automatically came north at the news of the sensational arrest which had been the front-page splash of every newspaper in the kingdom. But the expert witness who came with him caused a much greater sensation. He examined the contents of the two envelopes, and scratched his head.

"Is this a joke?" he demanded. "Every one of these bonds is perfectly genuine. There isn't a forgery among them."

The local inspector's eyes popped halfway out of his head.

"Are you sure?" he blurted.

"Of course I'm sure," snapped the disgusted expert. "Any fool can see that with half an eye. Did I have to give up a perfectly good day's golf to tell you that?"

Chief Inspector Teal was not interested in the expert's golf. He sat on a bench and held his head in his hands. He was not quite certain how it had been worked, but he knew there was something very wrong somewhere.

Presently he looked up.

"And Deever struck him in the office—that isn't denied?"

"No, sir," admitted the local inspector. "Mr. Deever said—"

"And you marched Templar through the streets in broad daylight, handcuffed to a constable?"

"Yes, sir. Knowing what I did about him—"

"I'd better see the Saint," said Teal. "If I'm not mistaken, someone's going to be sorry they knew so much."

He was shown into Simon's cell, and the Saint rose languidly to greet him.

"Hullo, Claud," he murmured. "I'm glad you've arrived. A gang of these local half-wits in funny hats—"

"Never mind that," said Teal bluntly. "Tell me what you're getting out of this."

Simon pondered.

"I shouldn't accept anything less than ten thousand pounds," he said finally.

The light in Chief Inspector Teal's understanding strengthened slowly. He turned to the local inspector, who had accompanied him.

"By the way," he said, "I suppose you never found that man

from Huddersfield, or whoever it was that blew the gaff?"

"No, sir. We've made inquiries at all the hotels, but he seems to have disappeared. I've got a sort of description of him—a fairly tall broad-shouldered man with a beard—."

"I see," said Teal, very sleepily.

Simon dipped into the local inspector's pocket and calmly borrowed a packet of cigarettes. He lighted one.

"If it's any help to you," he said, "the report of everything that happened in Deever's office is perfectly true. I went to him for some money, and then I went to him for some more. Every time I offered excellent security. I behaved myself like a law-abiding citizen—"

"Why did you call yourself Smith?"

"Why shouldn't I? It's a grand old English name. And I always understood that you could call yourself anything you liked so long as you didn't do it with intent to defraud. Go and tell Deever to prove the fraud. I just had to have some cash to go to the races, I had those Latvian bonds with me, and I thought that if I gave my real name I'd be making all sorts of silly difficulties. That's all there was to it. But did anyone make an honest attempt to find out if there was a fraud?"

"I see," said Teal again—and he really did see.

"They did not," said the Saint in a pained voice. "What happened? I was assaulted. I was abused. I was handcuffed and marched through the streets like a common burglar, followed by shop girls and guttersnipes, snapped by press photographers. I was shoved in a cell for forty-eight hours, and I wasn't even allowed to send for a clean pair of socks. A bunch of flat-footed nincompoops told me when to get up, when to eat, when to take exercise, and when to go to bed again—just as if I'd already been convicted. Deever's story has been published in every paper in the United Kingdom. And d'you know what that means?"

Teal did not answer. And the Saint's forefinger tapped him just where his stomach began to bulge, tapped him debonairly in the rhythm of the Saint's seraphic accents, in a gesture that Teal knew only too well.

"It means that there's one of the swellest legal actions on earth waiting for me to win it—an action for damages for wrongful imprisonment, defamation of character, libel, slander, assault, battery, and the Lord alone knows what not. I wouldn't take a penny less than ten thousand pounds. I may even want more. And do you think James Deever won't come across?"

Chief Inspector Teal had no reply. He knew Deever would pay.

ice cold murder

by . . . Lawrence Treat

Loman was warned he'd better stay in line. Hess would kill anyone who stepped out of line—or who was dangerous.

WE'RE just one big, happy family, here in the courthouse on the wide, paved square. We love each other. The crooked judges, the D.A. who knows who put him there, and the police department with enough sense to go easy on the rackets.

The prosecutor's office consisted of Beacher and Minelli and me. In that order. I have a small, corner office, and mostly they let me alone. Because they need me, to handle the amateurs who murder their wives and hold up gas stations for lack of rent money, and stuff like that. They give me a free hand on all the cases that aren't connected with the syndicate. That's why I'm here. For a front.

I'd had the job for two years and it gave me plenty of trial experience, which was what I wanted. But I was getting a little sick of it, as I told Janis Symonds on the lawn of the club, one magic, moonless evening.

Talking to her, I forgot that her father was a judge, and the wrong kind. I spoke of the many things I believed in and I held her close, and her gray eyes look-

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ed dark and soft. What we felt seemed one of the good things on this earth, and what we did was perfectly natural. I went home late that night dreaming of weddings, of Janis's wide, understanding eyes and the sweetness of her lips.

But the next day, she spoilt it all. She came to the courthouse to see her father, and later on stopped in to see Beacher, my chief. I was told about that visit, but I didn't connect it up until Beacher called me into his office.

I went with high hopes. Minelli, second in command, had been killed in an auto accident the week before, and I thought maybe I was due to take his place.

I wasn't. Beacher was his most paternal as he leaned back and called me "My boy," and said he'd been watching me and I was doing a fine job. Too good, in fact, to stay here. He mentioned that he'd had a little talk with Judge Symonds and discussed certain political openings where a bright young lawyer could make real money. Then, casually, Beacher asked me how I'd like to sit on the bench, in the Small Claims Court.

For a moment, the suggestion knocked me for a loop. I wondered what Janis had told her father, and whether he was trying to open up a career for his son-in-law, or whether he simply wanted me out of the way because now, without Minelli ahead of me, I might find out too much.

Neither idea appealed to me, so I told Beacher that I liked it fine where I was, because I got a certain type of experience that was valuable. Beacher merely shrugged and told me to think it over, I might change my mind. And then he went home and had a stroke.

I didn't know about that, however, when Janis called me. She sounded excited over the phone and asked me whether anything nice had happened today. I said no, and told her to lay off. She said she was trying to help me, and I said I didn't want any help. We had a pretty rough phone conversation and we were both upset when she hung up. But at least, things were clear between us.

I got the news about Beacher early the next morning. It meant that I was in charge of the prosecutor's office, but the significance of it didn't sink in. I was too busy tending to the details of work.

Nobody seemed worried that morning. Thanks to me and a chief clerk, the routine would go along without a hitch, we could arrange for court postponements, and in due time Beacher would be back on the job. He'd appoint a new assistant ahead of me, and everything would be under control.

Then it turned out that Beacher wouldn't be back for a long, long time, if ever. With the result that the county prosecutor, the key position with the right to decide which cases would be pushed and which would be forgotten about or dropped—the county prosecutor—me!

It was even crazier than that. Until Beacher resigned, nobody could be appointed over my head, because you can't fill an office that's already filled. And Beacher was in no condition even to write his name, much less resign. So, for the next few weeks, the world was mine.

No wonder Boss Morton called up. "Loman?" he said. "How'd you like to stop in at my office and have a little talk?"

"How'd you like to stop here, instead?" I suggested. "You're the one who wants to talk."

"Sure," he said. "Why not?" His voice was pleasant, unworried.

A little after five, he strolled in. He was a big moose of a man, powerful, fleshy, friendly. He had the voice for leadership and the calm steadiness that made people feel that they could leave everything up to him. He moved slowly and thought fast, looked easy-going and never wore out, spoke vaguely and cracked down with the precision of an electronic firing device.

He dropped ponderously into the armchair, took a cigar and surveyed me with a mildly amused stare. I couldn't help liking him.

"Never had the chance to get to know you," he began. His laughter rumbled pleasantly and the whole room seemed to warm up. "What are your plans, Steve?"

I liked the *Steve,* and I answered frankly. "I don't know," I said. "I haven't made any, yet."

It was peculiar that I was honest with him. I should have kicked him out and made copy for the morning papers. It would have put me in the driver's seat and made my future. PROSECUTOR THROWS OUT POLITICAL BOSS—SERVES NOTICE OF END OF CRIME-POLITICS PARTNERSHIP. I'd have been the hero of every decent-minded citizen in town.

But I wanted information, and I sat there and tried to dope out the kind of guy Morton was.

"You've got a good head on your shoulders," Morton declared presently. He rolled the cigar in his lips. "I was afraid you were going to make one of your courtroom speeches about justice and the high responsibilities of your office. Because I know a lot about you, Steve. I know the ideas you stand for, but I think you and I are pretty much alike, and that we can get along. We're both realists."

The way he said it, it was almost a compliment. "Now that

that's settled," I said, "we can talk. You came here to suggest that I go easy on certain cases. You want to make a deal, but it's no dice. I never took orders and I don't intend to start. And I certainly wouldn't take them from you."

He wasn't disturbed. "You've been here long enough to make a reputation, in a small way, and in my book you're a hell of a lot better than Beacher or Minelli or anybody else who sat behind that desk." He sprinkled it delicately with cigar ashes, to show what he really thought of that desk. "So, now that you're in the driver's seat, what are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know."

"If you don't, who in hell does?" he asked.

"Let's put it this way," I said. "When I find a case that smells, I'm going all-out on it. I just don't know, yet, which ones smell."

"Thanks," he said, nodding his massive head. "Now I'll tell you something. A lot of people think I run this town, but I don't. I take orders like everybody else, and so help me, I don't even know who gives them. The syndicate, sure. That's what everybody calls it, but I don't know their names, and I don't want to. I figure it would be unhealthy to find out."

"Murder," I said softly.

"That's right. And in this job of yours, you can do a lot of damage to them, so I figured I'd warn you. They play rough, Steve. If you make trouble, maybe they'll take it out on you, or maybe they'll take it out on me for not lining you up. But I'll lay a hundred to one that they crack down on both of us."

"What you're telling me," I said thoughtfully, "is either I do what you say, or I get bumped."

"Well, I wouldn't guarantee you'd get bumped. Maybe just beaten up, so you'll be out of circulation as long as Beacher is. And this isn't a threat or an order or even a piece of advice. It's just a statement of fact."

"If you feel that way about it," I smiled, "maybe you ought to give me a bodyguard."

"Maybe I'd like to," he said affably.

"You're getting sentimental, Morton."

"So I am. Suppose we go out and have a drink?"

And that was how it happened that the papers next day had a picture of Morton and me walking arm in arm down the steps of the courthouse. It looked like a deal, and maybe that was exactly what Morton had in mind when he'd come to see me late that afternoon. How would I know?

But that picture played its part in an unexpected way. I was studying a lot of back records and planning to prosecute a couple of

cases that had been pending quite a while, and would normally pend until everybody concerned had died or left town. I wanted to go slow, though. I wasn't sure whom I could trust.

My desk was piled high with folders when Detective Sam Foote strolled in. His eyes riveted themselves on me.

At first, I didn't get it. Sam had been a few years ahead of me in school, but we came from the same neighborhood and we'd always been friends. Whenever I could, I always worked with Sam. I could rely on him as completely as on myself.

He came in slowly, and I noticed the lines in his face. He had a newspaper under his arm and he slapped it on my desk, with the picture of Morton and me face up.

So that was it. The Morton business.

"I'm sick of this assignment in the D.A.'s office," Sam said tonelessly. "I want to get back to my old job, on the uniformed force. I feel at home there."

I picked up the paper and dumped it in the waste basket. "I told Morton I expected to run this office in my own way, and believe it or not, he understood. I think he even envied me."

"They should have written 'Kiss and make up', under that picture."

"You got him wrong, Sam. Morton plays the game the way it is. He didn't make the rules, and if he breaks them, he breaks himself. I don't think he's going to make any trouble for me."

"Boy!" said Sam. "Are you that dumb, or did they buy you up?"

"I'm going out after Phil Hess," I said.

Sam kind of jerked back, and it took him a few seconds to absorb my remark. Then he said, "I wouldn't, Steve. Pick somebody your own weight."

"I figure he is."

"You crazy fool—he'll kill you!"

"When I get him, I'll break the back of organized crime. There's no sense picking on the little fellows, especially when I only have a few weeks."

Sam got a grim look on his face and the lines set deep. "Steve," he said, "you're only three years younger than I am, and it's time you grew up. Now listen: There ain't no Santa Claus. And Phil Hess isn't the big shot."

"Who is?"

"I don't know. Somebody respectable and anonymous. You guess."

For some reason, Judge Symonds' name flashed across my mind, but that was ridiculous, of course. "Tell me about Hess," I said.

"He's the toughest, meanest and most ruthless guy I ever ran

across. I don't know how high up he is, but he's trouble. And if you did put him behind bars, you'd just be starting the job."

"Then let's start," I said. "First step, Hess. How do we get him?"

"Steve, three weeks from now either Beacher will be back giving orders, or he'll be out and you'll have somebody worse in his place."

"And when you came in, you thought *I* was backing down!"

Sam laughed, and I could tell he was happy. Just looking at him gave me confidence.

"I can't do this alone," I said. "The first thing is to get some publicity going and to build this up so that I have some strength. Then I can't be fired. So I'll show that the town's rotten at the core and that crime flourishes under the protection of the law and raises taxes."

"You need facts."

"I've got them," I said, opening one of the folders. "For a city of our size, we've got one of the best homicide records in the country. Statistics of arrests and convictions show we're practically a model town. Here—take a look at these figures. How many homicides do you find?"

Sam waved the paper away. "I don't know about that, but there are no false records, Steve. The police are all right. Want us to write 'homicide' on the blotter when we haven't even got a body? We know our job, so don't sell us short."

"If I'm wrong about this, I'm willing to learn."

"Take a look at those records. Is Lambert's name there? Hank Lambert? He's a professional hood, and he's missing, like quite a few others. But there's no homicide reported, is there? No crime, no homicide, no gang killing. He's just missing."

"What happened to his body?" I asked grimly.

"There is no body. If they found it, there'd be a homicide. But he's just missing, like a school kid. So they sent a truant officer after him."

"How come there's not a body?" I repeated. "How do you figure it?"

"Want me to guess?" he said. His eyes were twinkling and the lines on his face were smoothed out.

"Guess," I said.

"I guess that Phil Hess knocked him off. Phil has a system, and it must be a beauty. And what's more, he has a monopoly on murder. Any punk in the organization that commits murder without permission, Hess kills him. Hess is interested in keeping those statistics down. That's his job."

"What does he do with the bodies?"

"I don't know."

"Whom is he working for?"

"I don't know."

"Suppose you find out," I said.

Sam got up. "Sure," he said. "Real easy."

I gave the no-murders story to the papers. I stayed up late working on it, and it was a sensation. The morning paper and the evening paper—they both boiled it down to a paragraph and buried it on an inside page.

I decided to broadcast it on the local radio. It was fire-eating stuff. Ten minutes before I was due to go on the air, I was told that a clothing store had bought up the time and was sponsoring a new program called "Everybody Happy." So I hired a hall and put out announcements of the meeting, and the night before my speech, the hall burnt down. It was insured, too.

I knew that Judge Symonds had a large interest in both papers, and I found out that he was a major stockholder in the clothing store, too. John McManus, who looked as respectable as a frock coat, ran the radio station and owned the auditorium.

Janis's father, and his pal McManus. I began to see where I was going. But first, Hess.

I told Sam, but he was noncommittal. "What can you do about it?" he said. "I thought Hess was our Number One man."

"That's right. Making any progress?"

"Well, I found out that a little punk called Neddy the Mouth held out some dough on him, and that's one thing you can't do to Hess. He swore he'd get Neddy personally. Neddy's hiding somewhere, and me and Hess—we're both looking for him." Sam rose lazily. "Guess I'll look some more."

That afternoon I got a phone call. A strange voice said, "Mr. Loman? If you want to talk to Neddy the Mouth, you better go down to 207 Napoleon. And you better go fast."

I went.

I took a gun with me. I put it in my side pocket and it pulled my suit out of shape. I felt as if everybody was looking at me and saying, "That guy has a gun." Children practically crossed the street to get away from me. Or so it seemed.

I covered it with my handkerchief and transferred it to my hip pocket. It slipped in barrel first and I thought I'd shoot myself. I ducked into a doorway and turned the thing around and went back to the street. I was afraid my pants would fall down from the weight I was lugging. How do people manage to haul those things around, anyhow?

I finally solved the problem by keeping my hands in my pockets and holding up my trousers with my wrists. But I was shaky and nervous, because seeing Neddy the Mouth was the most dangerous thing I'd ever done in my

life. I tried to persuade myself that shooting the county prosecutor was the last thing in the world they'd do. *They*—something sinister about that word. Who in hell were *they*, anyhow?

207 Napoleon was an old frame house, gray and shabby and paintless, set between a couple of brick buildings. A three-foot alley separated the house from its neighbors on either side. The shutters were closed and the place looked haunted. It was dirty, dingy, smelly, evil, and it had a *For Sale* placard dangling from the porch.

I pushed the door open and walked in. It was cold here and the air was stale, and a dim, strained light filtered through the shutters. It was a place for rats and waterbugs, and not prosecuting attorneys. I took the gun out of my hip pocket and put it in my jacket. My legs felt lighter. At least I'd be able to run.

I took out a cigarette, lit a match and blew it out, because of the fire hazard. Then I lit the match again. The smoke tasted of damp, musty air. My throat was dry as beach sand. I looked into a couple of downstairs rooms. They were empty.

I climbed the stairs. The bannister was thick with dust and it swayed when I leaned on it. The treads creaked, and one of them cracked with the sound of splintering wood. I was about as silent as a tank.

The second floor was a little brighter than downstairs. Brighter and dirtier. I looked in a big front room and something scampered off. I turned back and entered the second room. There was a packing case in the center of it, and a man was sitting on the packing case.

He was shivering.

He didn't move and he didn't speak when he looked at me. His eyes didn't seem to have any pupils. They were bloodshot at the corners and the rest of them was a sort of gray, watery jelly. His lips were so swollen that at first I thought he'd been in a fight. Then I realized who it was.

I said, "Hello, Neddy."

He was staring right at me, but he didn't speak. Then I caught on. He was stone blind, and he'd only been blinded recently. His eyes had been battered to a pulp.

He let out a kind of moaning whisper. "Who's there? You come to take me away?"

I didn't answer because I couldn't. I was too horrified.

He broke suddenly and he sobbed out, "Who is it? Who is it?" His voice came shrill and eerie and then stopped, without an echo.

I had to swallow before I could speak. "Loman," I said. "Prosecutor's office."

"What do you want with me?" he asked, in that groaning whisper.

"I want to help you. I want to give you protection."

From somewhere in back, I thought I heard laughter. Ghostly laughter. That's right. It seemed to come from far away and then get closer and then fade away again.

Hearing things? Well, put yourself all alone in a deserted house with a gangster who's just had his eyes gouged out and can only talk in that whisper of pain, and see whether you hear things.

"I want to know who did this," I said.

Neddy didn't move. The light caught the ruin of his eyes and reflected the cold horror.

"I got nothing to say," he whispered. He began to shiver again. It was the only movement he made.

"Neddy," I said, "you know what I'm after, don't you?"

"Yeah," he whispered. "But you're all wrong. I don't know nothing. And if I did, I wouldn't tell. Mister, *I hurt!*"

"I'll get you to a hospital," I said. I grabbed his arm and he jerked so violently that I jumped back. "Leave me alone," he moaned.

I heard the laughter again. Distinctly.

I rushed out to the corridor and sprinted for the rear of the house, where the laughter had come from. It was pitch dark back there. I plunged through a doorway and something tripped me up. I went sprawling on the floor, rolled to my side and pulled my gun.

A dark shape seemed to materialize in the room and the gun was wrenched out of my hand. I tried to get up, and a fist slammed me back.

In a way, I was glad to get smacked. The feel of a fist restored my sense of reality. I'd rushed into a dark room and my eyes hadn't focused. Somebody had been waiting in here and his eyes were used to the darkness. Mine weren't.

I lay flat and didn't try to get up. The shape came over and I could see it was that of a big, hulking man. He kicked me in the shoulder and turned me over.

I stayed there, not moving. I didn't even move when the shot banged out from the next room. I heard footsteps jumping up and down, and a shrill, excited giggle. I was afraid that if I turned around to identify the other man in the room, I'd get shot. I kept my face to the floor, smelling the musty odor of decayed planking. I waited while the sound from the other room came closer and at least two men pounded past me and went down the back stairs. Then I turned slowly. I was alone.

I picked myself up. I can't remember much of what I did. I recall standing in the room where I'd spoke to Neddy a few minutes ago, but this time I was staring

at his body. He was draped over the packing case, and he'd been shot in the head. I looked and then, suddenly, I got sick. I remember telling myself that here, at least, was a real murder, body and all, and no more of this missing business. Then I was in a phone booth calling the police and explaining what had happened.

I waited in the street, within sight of 207 Napoleon. Nobody came out of the house and, of course, nobody went in.

I was badly shaken. My cheek was scraped and bruised and the shoulder of my jacket was torn. My mouth tasted as if I had the world's worst hangover. I wanted a drink badly. I lit a cigarette and could hardly hold the match. When I heard the siren, I reminded myself that I was the county prosecutor and had to pull myself together.

Captain Tilney was in the squad car. It pulled up alongside me and Tilney boomed out, "Hello, Mr. Loman. You look like you had trouble."

"Not me. In that house over there. Second floor."

Tilney had a swaying, lumbering gait, like a seaman trying to keep his footing on the slope of a deck. I let him and a couple of cops go inside first, and I followed. Tilney's foot went through the broken step and he almost fell. He rumbled, "Watch out for that step," and tramped up.

He was well ahead of me, and his deep voice thundered from the second floor. "Which room, Mr. Loman?"

"Middle one," I called up.

He was in the corridor when I reached the landing. "You must have got mixed up," he said.

I pushed past him and went into the room. The packing case was still there, but no corpse. I got red in the face. They must have carried it out the rear door while I was watching the front. Still—

Then my mouth dropped open. There wasn't a drop of blood on the packing case. I knelt down. There'd been quite a mess on the floor, and I'd contributed my share. But the decayed planking had no sign of anything wrong.

"Well?" Tilney said.

I rubbed my forehead. "Neddy the Mouth was dead on that packing case ten minutes ago, and his brains were all over the place."

"Sure," Tilney roared. "But where the hell is he now?"

"Listen," I said stiffly. "You're a cop—I'm not. My job is to prepare cases, yours is to investigate, and that's what I'm asking you to do. Let me know what you find."

"For the love of Mike!" Tilney exclaimed.

I trudged downstairs angrily, and that was the biggest mistake I ever made. Because if I'd stayed there and told Tilney about the

voice that laughed and shrieked with joy, and of the footsteps jumping up and down, he might have known where to go.

I'm not proud of what I did the rest of the afternoon. I stopped at the first bar and had a couple of quick ones, and then I went back to the office and waited for Sam. I needed his dry sarcasm and his matter-of-fact approach, and so I waited.

I had the main play figured. Hess had wanted to teach me a lesson, and he'd done it. He'd tried to tell me he could murder somebody practically in front of my eyes, and get away with it. Somehow or other, he'd conjured away the body and all traces of the crime, and I was helpless.

So I crawled into my office and waited for Sam. He didn't show up. I left word for him to get in touch with me, and I went home. But first, I asked a detective how to carry a gun, and he borrowed a shoulder holster and showed me how to strap it on. The revolver still felt uncomfortable, and a slow gunman could probably have gotten in three shots before I had my blunderbuss loose, but at least I was armed. And I practised taking the thing out of the holster.

I went back to my hotel. I have two rooms at the Swift, and it felt good to be in a place with carpets and vases and people always in sight and a whole army of bellhops and elevator boys. But before the night was over, I learnt exactly how good they were.

I returned at six, still a little shaky, but definitely one of the innocents. I saluted the desk clerk and kidded the elevator man and basked in the prestige of my office. But I guess I left it in the corridor.

I came in whistling, because it was nice to be home and think of a hot bath and relaxation. I slammed the door, tossed my hat on the table, and then I stopped short and gaped.

There was nothing flashy about her. She had light blue eyes and auburn hair, and when she smiled, you felt as if you'd found a new playmate.

"Hello," she said. "I hope you don't mind my waiting here."

"You seem to know me," I said.

"From your picture. That one on the front page last week—it's a fairly good likeness, although you're younger and funnier. More of a sense of humor, I mean."

"Miss—er—" I said, and waited.

"Call me Ruthie," she said. "I hate being formal. And it's cozy here. Sort of intimate."

So that was it. Somebody was going to step out of a closet and take pictures. Not that she looked the type. But if she'd looked the type, the trick would never work.

"You seem perplexed," she

said. "As if you were going to propose and didn't know how to start."

"The chances are against my proposing. I never do it the first hour, rarely the first day and usually not even the first week. In fact, I usually wait until I'm in love with the girl."

"I don't know how we got on the subject of marriage," she said. "Although it's a very pleasant subject."

"Suppose," I said, "we go down to the lobby and talk."

"About what?" she said.

"You're asking me!" I said sarcastically.

"Of course. You don't expect me to guess what you have in mind, do you?"

It was obvious that one of us was a screwball, and it wasn't me. "Let's get this straight," I said. "I've never seen you before in my life. Somehow, you managed to break into my apartment, and now you want to know what I'd like to talk about."

"Naturally. And as for getting in, that was easy." She didn't explain her method, but later on I found out it was with a pass key. "And why I'm here, I don't know. All I can tell you is that I got your message."

"What message?"

She opened her pocketbook and took out a message blank. It had the time and the date, and it read, "Mr. Steven Loman wants to see you at his place, around six. Urgent." Her name did not appear.

"Somebody's playing jokes," I said. "I couldn't very well call you, because I don't even know you."

"I'm Phil Hess's wife," she said suavely, and then she started screaming.

She had lung power, but she didn't have to use it long. A heavy rap sounded on the door. I kept my hand close to my gun, walked quietly to the door and yanked it open suddenly.

The house detective and a bellboy were standing there. Roberts, the house detective, said, "What's the trouble, Mr. Loman."

I buttoned my jacket so that the gun wouldn't show. "That's what I'd like to know. A woman breaks into my room and yells. Miraculously, you're right outside."

"Nothing miraculous, Mr. Loman. I got a call to rush up here. The elevator boy tagged along, and I heard a scream. So I rapped."

Ruthie let out a tinkle of laughter. "I'm so sorry," she said. "Did you think something was wrong? I just couldn't help screaming when I saw that mouse."

"Mouse!" Roberts spluttered.

"Take her downstairs with you," I said. "And call me back in a few minutes, will you?"

Ruthie gave me a light kiss on

the cheek, and sauntered off with her escorts.

Roberts phoned about five minutes later. "Mr. Loman?" he said.

"Yes. I'd like to know who made the call that brought you up."

"It came from one of the house phones, in the lobby, but nobody seems to have noticed who made it."

"Maybe that's not your fault," I said, "but this girl got into my room and was there when I came home, and that sort of thing is your responsibility. So don't let it happen again, man *or* woman."

"Yes, Mr. Loman. You can count on me."

So that was that. I looked through my apartment carefully. No hidden microphones, nothing disturbed. Which didn't explain why she'd come or why she'd backed down just when she had me where she must have wanted me. She didn't claim assault, or anything of that kind. Oh, no. She just said it was a mouse. And claimed she was Mrs. Phil Hess.

I decided to check on that, and I called Captain Tilney. He hadn't found out anything further at the house on Napoleon Street.

"By the way," I said. "Is Phil Hess married?"

"Sure. Swell little number, too. Nobody knows how he got a dame like her."

"What does she look like?" I asked. I was sweating slightly.

"One in a million. Small, nothing flashy about her. Light blue eyes and auburn hair. They said she used to be a show girl."

"Thanks," I said, and hung up. She really was Hess's wife.

I couldn't dope it out, unless there'd been a hitch somewhere and the plan hadn't come off. Here Hess's wife walks into my place, wastes a little time and then screams. And that scream had been timed. The call to the house detective had brought him to my floor just at the right moment to hear it. And then—nothing. She'd blamed it on a mouse.

I didn't understand. But whatever the purpose had been, I smelled trouble ahead.

Roberts called again. He said he'd checked, and found out that she'd had a key, probably a house key, and somebody had seen her unlock my door and go in. Roberts asked if I wanted to have my lock changed, and I said I sure did.

I spent a miserable evening. I phoned Sam Foote's home a couple of times, but he wasn't there. I was plenty worried. Around midnight I got in touch with the police and told them he was missing.

Missing. The word was ominous.

There was still no word from him the next morning. I had a lot to do, and one of my errands took me downstairs, to the clerk's office near the judges' chambers.

I was on my way back when the door of Symonds' office opened and Janis came out. She was crying, and when she saw me she lifted her head, and her mouth was trembling. I must have been just a blurred image to her tear-stained eyes, because, after a moment, she started to turn away.

"Janis," I said. "What's the trouble?"

She stiffened, and let out a gasp. She bit hard at her lips and spoke in a choked up voice. "Steve. Oh—you fool!"

"What's the matter?" I said.

"You know perfectly well. Terrible things are going to happen and they'll be all your fault."

"Terrible things? To whom?"

"To you," she said.

"Janis, tell your father—" But I stopped myself. After all, there was no use in saying things. And I guess she realized it, too. She gave a little sob, and then turned and walked away swiftly.

Back in my office, I fidgeted, did routine work and kept thinking about her, and about Sam. Sam bothered me more than anything else. I knew he'd been after Neddy, but I had no idea where Sam had gone or whom he'd seen or what leads he'd been following up. The police didn't seem to know, either.

I was discussing something not too important—I think it was a liquor license violation—with a detective by the name of Royce, when my secretary rang my buzzer. I picked up the intercom and said, "Yes?"

"A Mr. Phil Hess to see you," she said. And then added in a low voice that I could barely hear: "Careful, he seems angry."

"Send him in," I said. Then I turned to Royce. "I may need you. This sounds like trouble."

Royce nodded and sidled over, alongside the door. Then it slapped open as if a tornado had hit it, and this long-headed powerhouse of bone and muscle charged in. He was so seething mad you could practically see the sparks in his eyes. His mouth was set in a tight, thin line. His body was like solid rubber, strong, resilient, and he was charged with energy.

He strode in and began spitting words from the door. "You cheap, double-crossing, hypocritical rat! I'm going to take you apart and smash up every piece of you."

I stayed in my chair and leaned back. "What's this all about?" I asked quietly.

"Punk!" he spat out. "You know damn well why I'm here. My wife."

"Your wife?" It looked as if I was due to find out the reason for last night's visit.

"She was in your apartment yesterday," he snapped.

"Sure. And I wish I knew why."

Hess's jaw tightened so hard that the muscles ridged up on his

cheek. "I know damn well she's been running around with somebody, but I didn't know who it was until this morning. And you know how I found out? Through a house detective."

"I think you've got things a little twisted," I said.

Hess let out a yelp of explosive laughter, and then clipped it short. "Loman, you may think you're a big shot and you're safe in your own office, but you're wrong. I'm going to beat you up right here, and it's going to be a pleasure." And he dived at me.

That was when Royce sprang. He grabbed Hess by the arm and twisted. I rang my emergency buzzer and jumped up and got hold of Hess's other arm. He tried to kick me, and he wrestled the two of us across the room, and then the door opened and reinforcements came. They handled him fast and rough, and slapped him into a chair and put bracelets on him. Royce pulled his gun, just to be safe.

Hess was gasping for air, but he was still mad and full of fight. "You think you're safe, Loman," he snarled, "but you're not. I'll get you with your stooges or I'll get you without them, but I'll nail you good. So you better make your hospital reservation, for a nice, long stay."

I turned away, and Royce said, "What you want to do with him?"

"Charge him with assault and battery, for a start," I said. "Any deadly weapons on him?"

Hess laughed contemptuously. "When I go after you, I do it with my bare hands."

Royce frisked him expertly and said, "No gun, but he's got a seal ring with a nasty edge. Call that a dangerous weapon?"

"No, forget it." I sat down on the edge and lit a cigarette. "Hess," I said, "you're crazy. Somebody's been telling you a pack of lies, and you don't even know it."

"Sure," he said sarcastically. "I'm dumb. Ruthie didn't go to your place, she didn't have a key, did she?"

"Take him away," I said. "When he cools off, I'll talk to him. Somebody filled him up with this nonsense and sent him here to take it out on me. Somebody that's trying to frame him into a murder and me into a corpse. Or the other way round, maybe. They might be figuring I'd kill him."

"I wouldn't worry about that," said Hess. "You got it right the first time, *you're* due to be the corpse. And it's no frame."

I nodded to Royce, and he and a husky attendant walked Hess out of the room. I watched the door close, and then I sat down. I could guess, now, why Ruthie Hess had screamed in my apartment yesterday.

After all, I'm the county prosecutor, and even Hess can't beat

me up just for the fun of it. He has to have a first-class reason, and the best reason he could have was an affair between me and his wife. On that theory, Hess himself might have sent Ruthie to my place, arranged to have her scream and arranged for a witness to break in immediately afterwards. That would give him an excuse to send me to the hospital for a few weeks, and would effectively stop the Steve Loman reform wave.

But that didn't sound like Phil Hess, gangster. His method would be to grab me on some dark street and give me the works. Besides, who ever heard of a gangster pretending his wife was in love with the prosecutor? It would make him a laughing stock; it made no sense.

I wished Sam Foote were here. He had a calm, sardonic, matter-of-fact way of looking at things. I tried to imagine how he'd analyze it.

"This Hess baby," he'd say, "has an Achilles heel, and that's his wife. So some bright boy that likes other people to do his work and wants both you and Hess out of the way thinks up this idea of making Hess jealous. He figures Hess will lose his head, and you'll lose your life."

Well, who? And why? And how?

The only person who could tell me was Ruthie Hess. I looked up the Hess address, grabbed my hat and went out. As I stepped out of the elevator, I saw a tall, angry guy stride down the corridor and slam himself through the revolving door. I followed and watched Hess plow down the steps, wave at a cab and slam the door so hard that I thought it would break.

I hesitated, and Royce detached himself from the side door and approached me. "Hess just left," he said. "You saw him?"

I nodded. "How'd he get out so fast?"

"A bondsman was waiting. Had cash and a title deed to a piece of property. Any kind of bail they asked for, he had it right in his pocket. Lawyer waiting, too. I never saw anybody get sprung that fast."

"Who accepted the bail? Who released him?"

Royce spat solemnly on the sidewalk. "Judge Symonds," he said. "Like me to follow you around?"

"It might be a good idea," I said. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it," said Royce. He started picking his teeth as I went down the steps. I didn't turn around, but I knew he had me in sight, and the idea was comforting.

I'd walked about a block, along the main business district, when Ruthie stepped out from nowhere and hooked her arm in mine.

"Hello," she said, in that clear

voice of hers. "I was hoping I'd see you."

My pulses raced at the touch of her, but I told myself that this was Phil Hess's wife and she was dynamite. If I'd had to go out and find her, I wouldn't have been so edgy. But the way she'd been waiting for me boded no good.

"The place to see me," I said coldly, "is in my office. Let's go back."

"No," she said, shaking her head quickly, as if in terror. "He'd hear about it, he'd do something. I'm scared."

"Where then?"

"Anywhere. A bar, a coffee place—it doesn't matter."

"We'll have a drink," I said.

I figured that was safer, if anything could be safe with her. Because I had an idea of what she was doing. Last night she'd framed me in my apartment, today she was framing me on a public street. Well, let her. The only way to learn anything was to let the scheme take shape. And besides, being with her was almost worth it, no matter what happened.

I steered her into a café and we sat down in a booth. I ordered a couple of beers. About a minute later, Royce came in and stationed himself at the end of the bar.

Meanwhile, I started questioning her. "Why did you come to my place yesterday?" I asked.

"I was told to."

"By whom?"

"I don't know, any more than you do. I showed you the message."

"You'll have to give me a better answer than that, because Phil came into my office and wanted to beat me up, on account of you. I had to book him on an assault charge."

"He's dangerous, you don't realize what jealousy does to him." Her hand crept across the table and pressed mine. "Steve, he'll kill me!"

"How did he find out about your visit?"

"I don't know."

"How did you happen to find me this afternoon?"

"I'd been waiting all day, you're the only person I can turn to. I decided to wait on the square until you came out, and when I saw you, I followed. I saw Phil leave, too." She leaned forward, and her other hand seized mine. "Steve, I need you so. Don't you trust me?"

"I will if you tell me where Sam Foote is."

"Foote? Who is he?"

"A detective working out of my office," I said. "Well?"

She released my hand and leaned back, and she spoke with anguish. "If I only knew anything! But Phil never trusts me. He knows I'd leave him if I could. But I'm scared, he'd hunt me down, he'd never give up. He'd kill me for leaving him."

"Why, if you don't know anything?"

"He's afraid I might guess things."

"Guess what? Ruthie, if you really want help, quit stalling."

She gave me a pleading look. "If I make guesses, I'm putting my life in your hands. Do you want that?"

"I want information. And I'll give you twenty-four-hour protection, if you say the word."

She nodded. "Steve, go to the Zero-Freeze plant, and look around. Don't do anything and don't go alone. And don't go when *he's* there."

"How will I know about that?"

"I'll phone him and tell him to meet me, here. I'll have him here at four o'clock, and I'll keep him for at least an hour. Then you'll be safe."

"Thanks," I said. "I'll see what I can do."

On my way out, I stopped and spoke to Royce. "Keep an eye on her," I said. "Things may be starting up."

I took her warning seriously. I took it so seriously that I didn't even want to go to the Zero-Freeze place with a cop, because that would put them on their guard.

Back in my office, I checked on the hunt for Foote. There was nothing. Then I called the Board of Health and said, "Loman speaking. There's a food violation I've been having trouble with. Send somebody over here, but make it somebody that knows how to take care of himself."

They sent Cullen. He looked like the village blacksmith. I didn't know how bright he was, but he could have cracked anvils with his teeth.

He had a car with the Health Department insignia, and I didn't brief him until we were on our way. "Cullen," I said, "if you want to back out of this, it's perfectly okay, because this isn't exactly routine. We may not run into anything much, but on the other hand, we may run into a bunch of killers. And they may be waiting for us, too."

Maybe everything had to filter through those layers of muscle, but it took Cullen a couple of minutes before he could answer. Then he said, "Can't expect everything to fall in your lap." He drove thoughtfully for about a block. "What are we after?" he asked.

"I'm not sure. We're going to the Zero-Freeze place because I got a tip that Phil Hess has something to do with it. I don't even know what I'm looking for, so pretend you're just on a routine check-up. We'll go through the plant and look at as much of it as we can. Maybe we'll ask to see the books. Stick close and don't say anything, but keep your eyes open."

He stopped for a red light, but he made no comment until it had changed. "Okay," he said. "Sure."

Zero-Freeze Products, Inc., was on a siding across the railroad tracks. It consisted of two large buildings that had formerly been warehouses and had been converted into the freezing plant. One of the buildings looked as if it hadn't been used in years. An ice truck was parked at the loading platform of the other one, and a conveyor belt was making a terrific din as it dumped cracked ice into the truck. For the restaurant trade, Cullen explained, as he parked a few feet from it. We got out and climbed the platform, and a couple of warehousemen spotted us and yelled at us before we could go inside.

The one with a thin face and a scar over his eye snapped at us. "What in hell do you think you're doing here?" he demanded.

"Health Department," I said.

Cullen took out his credentials. "We got a complaint on the grading of a shipment to one of your customers," he said. "I got orders to check up."

"Wait here," said thin face. He had to yell to make himself heard above the clatter of the belt. "I'll go see." He went to the back of the loading shed and opened a door.

I tapped Cullen's shoulder. "Come on," I said. "I don't know what there is to see."

We went inside and up a flight of stairs, and I opened a door and then jumped back as the cold hit me. "Wow!" I said. Then I reached in and found a light button.

The room was a storage chamber, and the temperature must have been around zero. Cartons containing frozen vegetables were piled neatly enough. I backed away from the cold, and jammed into a big, hulking guy. His voice boomed at me.

"You guys make yourselves plenty at home, don't you?"

I looked up at the guy. He was Cullen's size, but had more fat on him. His stomach curved out in a beautiful arc. He was wearing a blue jersey and a pair of dirty, blue pants.

"Got work to do," Cullen said slowly. "Can't waste time waiting to get told I can do my job."

"Yeah?" said the fat man. "Get out of here." He spat on the floor, and that wasn't sanitary. I didn't bring the point to his attention, and I stepped back to the hallway. Because of the cold, and not because of what he'd said.

Cullen took his time, and then he came out. "How many of these storage rooms you got?" he asked.

The guy in the blue jersey glared. "Three," he said.

We went through them, and it was about twenty after four when we finished up. We'd gotten nowhere. I wondered whether Ruthie had given me the run-

around, or whether we were missing out on something. We were standing in the corridor when somebody yelled from upstairs. "Hey, Charlie—give us a hand up here."

The big guy yelled back. "Wait a minute, will you? I'm busy."

The voice upstairs called out again. "Hey, can you hear me? Come on up?"

Charlie said, "Stay here," and went towards the stairs. I heard him talking in a loud voice, but I couldn't hear what he said. I moved off in the opposite direction, towards the rear of the hallway. There were no lights here, and I took a flashlight out of my pocket and snapped it on. Then I saw the door with the padlock.

My light was still focused on it when Charlie came back, muttering something about what did they take him for, they should have known he was busy.

I said to him, "What's in there?"

"Empty," he said. "We don't use it. Look, I got to go upstairs. You guys want anything else?"

"Yes," I said. "I want to go in that room."

"It's locked," Charlie said. "You can see that for yourself, can't you?"

"Unlock it."

"I got no key. And there's none around, that I know of."

I turned to Cullen. "Can you get it open?"

He looked around and saw a length of pipe. He picked it up and slapped at the padlock, which snapped open from the blow. He shoved at the door.

It was pitch dark inside, and I fumbled for a light switch and snapped it on. I heard Cullen let out his breath. Charlie swore, and I felt as if my stomach had been ripped out. My heart gave two enormous thumps, and then it seemed to stop.

There were three of them, but the only one I recognized was Neddy the Mouth. The other two were slumped up against the wall, like wax dummies. Neddy was still hunched over on the spattered packing case, just the way I'd seen him yesterday, and the packing case rested on a patch of linoleum that looked like old planking.

For a moment, I was paralyzed by sheer terror. They were pathetically lifelike, those bodies frozen in the attitude in which they had died. The bullet-holes showed dark and ugly in their foreheads. I shivered.

Then my brain started to work again, and I understood. I saw why there had been no bloodstains when Tilney had examined the house on Napoleon Street. The bloodstains had been on the linoleum, and at the time I'd thought it was bare flooring. After I'd left, the body, the packing case and the linoleum had been taken out the back of the house, and a duplicate crate had

been substituted. The whole business had been done smoothly and quietly.

I turned around slowly. Cullen's eyes were steady and fearless and unblinking, and he was absolutely motionless. Charlie looked genuinely surprised. Behind him, two men were covering us with guns. The thin man with the scar, and a small, jockey-like man. When he saw me turn, he began giggling. It was the laughter I'd heard when Neddy the Mouth had been killed.

"Well, you seen what you come for," the thin man said. "So come on up to the office. Friend of yours waiting."

Sam, I supposed. They'd caught him and were holding him here. By night time, there would be three more bodies in that cold storage room. Sam's, Cullen's and mine.

Cullen marched stolidly down the corridor and up the stairs. I followed right behind him. I still had my gun, but it would have been suicide to draw it.

Phil Hess didn't move as we entered the office. He was sitting on a desk, one knee drawn up to his chin. He was smoking, and he said, "Hello, Loman. Ruthie said you'd be here."

The thin man and the little guy that giggled crossed the room, so that they were on one side of it and Cullen and me on the other. Charlie slumped into a chair, and was sort of in the middle.

"How'd you get here?" Hess said. "Ruthie?"

I shook my head. Apparently she'd doublecrossed me and sent me into a trap, but there was no point in signing her death warrant by saying she'd told me about this place.

"How'd you get here?" Hess asked again. "First that slob detective, and now you."

I still didn't say anything. Sam's body hadn't been in that room of horrors, and so maybe he was still alive.

Hess took out his gun. "Well," he said, "the kid prosecutor sure gets around. You should have applied at the office for a tour of inspection. Still, I'll tell you how it's done. Most times, we just handle 'em dead, but we'll make an exception in your case. We'll store you alive, huh? We keep 'em until Fridays, when we deliver ice and frozen stuff out at the airport. Along with that, we sometimes have a coffin or so, which we load in a special plane. It flies out to sea, and then dumps the stiffs. You wanted to find out, Loman. Well, now you know."

"Where's Sam Foote?" I asked.

I watched Hess closely, but I couldn't tell whether he was lying or not. He said casually, "This Foote guy, he died somewhere. Huh, Goody?"

The tiny guy giggled. "I never miss," he said cheerfully.

I'd forgotten all about Cullen,

but now I became aware that something was happening to him. His breath came slow and wheezy from his chest, his face grew red and his lips tightened up. He swayed slightly and stumbled forward.

"Let me go!" he muttered.

I yelled. "Get back—he'll shoot!" But Cullen just bowled forward in a suicidal lunge. His fist swung at Hess and then Hess's gun thundered and the little fellow called Goody began jumping up and down and screeching with insane joy. He began pumping lead into Cullen's sagging body.

I didn't wait. For a second or so they were busy with Cullen. He'd gotten sore in his slow, one-tracked way. He'd wanted to hit Phil Hess and he'd done it.

I picked up a chair, swung it at the window and dived. I didn't know whether they were firing at me or not. The jagged glass sliced at my clothes and took off my hat, and I went sailing through the air. Somehow, I bent up my legs and landed on my feet, pitched forward and rolled. I picked myself up and scooted for the corner of the building, keeping close to the wall.

It didn't take any brains to figure out I'd be dead as soon as I hit the open. Momentarily, but momentarily only, I could keep out of range by hugging the wall.

I sprinted around the corner, saw the padlocked door of the second building and an old truck with no motor. I ducked underneath the wreck of a truck and found a loose grating. I didn't figure out what it was or where it would take me. A sewer or a cellar, I supposed, if I supposed at all. I yanked at the cover, jumped in and slammed it over my head as my feet slipped. I went skidding and scrambling downwards and slapped into an emtpy coal bunker. When the sounds of my arrival echoed away, I heard groaning.

I took out my gun and walked, very slowly, towards the sound. When I was near it, a low, hoarse voice spoke. "Steve!" it said. And I gasped out, "Sam!"

I couldn't see him too well, but I could tell he was hurt, and I got down and put my arm around him. He pitched forward against my chest and began sobbing. He was only half conscious. They weren't tears of fright and he hadn't lost his nerve, but he'd gone through too much. Something had to break.

I heard noise above, and voices muttered at each other, but nobody clanged on the grating. They hadn't thought of looking under the broken-down truck. They figured I was at the junk heap, behind the building. It wasn't until later on that they guessed. And when they did, they knew I was trapped.

Meanwhile I crouched there, with Sam in my arms. I snapped

on my flashlight and saw his shirt was stained with blood, but there was nothing I could do to help him.

After a while he quieted down. "Steve," he said.

"Yes?"

"Listen, Steve. You got to get out of here. You can climb up that chute, you can manage. I go upstairs to the door at the other end of the cellar and start shooting. They all beat it down to my end, and you run like hell and then get help. See?"

"Don't be a fool," I said. "I got in here and I know how to get out." I wished I did, but I wanted to give Sam some hope. "They obviously don't know you're here. Now tell me what happened."

"I was following Neddy, and they caught me. Yesterday. They brought me here, and I jumped out of the car as they came through the gate. They fired in the dark and they nicked me, but they don't know. I found that grating and fell through. Been here ever since."

"Sam," I said, "I'm leaving you, so just lay low. But if anybody comes down that chute, it won't be me."

"Sure," he said. "Anybody comes down that way, I'll get him."

"Naturally," I said, "there's a chance something might happen to me. So just in case, I'd better tell you the set-up."

I explained the whole fantastic scheme that Hess had worked out, to dispose of the bodies of whomever he knocked off. Then Sam and I shook hands, and I got up and walked across the basement.

There was a rickety staircase with a door at the top. I opened it and found myself in a big, empty, shed-like room. The cracks of light at one end showed me where the entrance was.

I knew that, eventually, they'd come through that door. I'd get as many of them as I could, but I didn't think much of my chances. I was certain that the shots and the smashing of the office window hadn't been heard, else help would have come by now. Maybe the sound of the conveyor belt had drowned out the other noises.

I found a box and set it up near the door. I sat down, took my gun out, and waited. Hess, I figured, was through, although I might not be around to prepare the case against him. But the Board of Health knew Cullen had gone with me, and the car with the Health Department insignia ought to be easy to trace. When the police got here, they'd rip the Zero-Freeze place apart and they'd get Hess. Eventually. Hess probably knew who was at the head of the crime syndicate, but he wouldn't talk. I had no proof, either.

I wrote my information and

my suspicions of Judge Symonds on a piece of paper and left it where the police would find it. That was the best I could do. I had just finished when I heard the rumble of a freight going past on the nearby tracks. Simultaneously, a key scratched at the door. They knew I was here, and they intended to do any shooting under cover of the clattering sound of that freight.

I watched the door open a crack. A shaft of light shot across the concrete floor, and Hess's voice snapped, "Go on in. What the hell are you waiting for?" Then the door flung wide, but nobody appeared.

I was just to the side of it, in a position for a surprise attack. I hoped Sam would stay where he was. I hoped that they wouldn't go down to the basement after they finished me off. I hoped a lot of things.

Charlie stepped in, cautiously. Apparently they'd decided he was the one to sacrifice, that he'd be the shock troops.

I lifted up on my toes and held the gun high. I brought it down with a sickening thud, and then I yelled and charged out, with my gun firing.

The suddenness and unexpectedness of my dash saved me. I saw Hess and the little guy and the thin-faced man, and they scattered. My aim was bad, but I made a lot of noise and I was dangerous, and they got out of the way. Once I was past them, they could pick me off.

The big black car was only twenty feet away, and I sprinted for it and dived through the open window and landed sprawled out on the front seat. I kept my head down, and I reached out for the ignition switch. Then a pleasant, familiar voice spoke up.

"Steve boy," it said. "Don't turn that key. Please."

I twisted my head and almost scraped my nose against the gun muzzle. Morton, smiling pleasantly, was leaning over me. "Now drop that gun of yours, and then open the door and kick it out."

With a sick, beaten feeling, I obeyed. Then Morton sighed and dropped back on the rear seat. His revolver still covered me.

"That was quite a dash of yours," he said. "They didn't fire, of course, because they might have hit me. And I'm too important to put in hazard." He rumbled with deep, musical laughter. "Now isn't that a nice phrase, Steve? Put in hazard?"

I didn't say anything. Morton turned slightly and called to Hess. "Just leave us a little while, we'd like to talk." Then he addressed me again. "What do you think of my set-up, Steve?"

"Yours?"

"Sure. I think you ought to give me credit, because I'll be disappointed if you don't say something nice. The organization

I've built up. The front I have. You never even suspected me. You thought Judge Symonds was the big boy, didn't you?"

"He's certainly involved," I said.

Morton shrugged. "Poor little guy, I have him in my pocket, I own him like I own a share of stock. Bought and paid for, with a certificate to prove it. You see, a long time ago he got in a financial jam and embezzled some money, and it's my business to know about things like that. So I made him sign a confession, and I can jail him any time I want to. But on the whole, he's rather soft. Ever since the pressure has been on, he's been thinking of suicide."

"Then that's why Janis—"

"Exactly," said Morton. "Poor girl, caught between being responsible for her father's suicide, or else giving you up. And half-realizing the danger she was leaving you in. I feel sorry for her, Steve."

I sat up a little straighter. There was at least one good thing that Morton was telling me. Janis. She'd tried too hard, maybe, to help me, but otherwise, everything she'd done was fine and good.

"What about Ruthie?" I asked. "How does she come in?"

"I thought that was obvious. Phil was getting suspicious, although he had no idea whom she was playing around with. Besides, Phil was getting careless, he's the weak link in my organization, because of that temper of his. But I learnt one thing in politics, Steve, and it goes any place—make your enemies scrap among themselves, and you're all right. So I set things up, with Ruthie's help, to turn Hess against you. In one way or another, that would take care of both you and Hess, and I could have Ruthie, with no further complications."

"I see," I said. "But why tell me? Aren't you afraid I'll use this, and turn Hess against you "

"He wouldn't believe that. I'm perfectly safe. And now that I've explained things, let's proceed with our business." And he opened the window next to him. "Phil," he called out. "Take him."

They brought me up to the office with the broken window. Cullen's body had been taken away, and Charlie was no longer present, but Ruthie brightened the place up nicely. Except that, at the moment, I didn't appreciate her.

How do you feel that last moment, when you're going to be killed? It just doesn't seem real. I looked at Morton, big, warm, friendly, and at Ruthie who seemed more beautiful than ever. I heard Goody begin to giggle, and I glared at Phil Hess and I hated him with all my being.

"You damn fool!" I said. "You poor stooge! Morton and

Ruthie—don't you understand?"

"The boss wouldn't do that," Hess said coldly. "No! Not to me."

"That's right," Morton said. There seemed to be laughter hidden in his voice, and he added, almost casually, "Shoot him, Phil."

Hess's gun came up. Ruthie gasped and put her arms around Morton and said breathlessly, "Honey—hold me tight!" And she glued her lips against his.

At the give-away, Hess whirled. His back was to me as he shot Morton between the eyes. Then slowly, as if he was counting to himself, he began shooting at Ruthie. Goody jumped up and down. In a kind of homicidal insanity, he joined in, emptying his gun as fast as he could. But Hess was still firing, in that slow count, until his trigger clicked empty.

After that, he just stood there in shock, while I took the gun out of his hands, and then picked up the phone and called the police.

NEXT MONTH—

Carter Dickson's BLIND MAN'S HOOD

Sax Rohmer's HOUSE OF GOLDEN DEATH

Rex Stout's NOBODY DESERVED JUSTICE

Q. Patrick's THE MARRINER MURDER

Frank O'Rourke's THE LAST SHOT

Leslie Charteris' THE GOLDEN JOURNEY

and

ADVENTURE OF THE MOSAIC CYLINDERS

A NEW SOLAR PONS NOVELET by AUGUST DERLETH

—in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

beginners' slope

by . . . R. G. G. Price

Who was this man who'd discuss Aquinas or natural history and knew things so foul even Flambeau was startled?

WHEN Monsignor Ronald Knox satirized the Higher Criticism by applying the methods used on the Bible and Greek and Latin texts to the Sherlock Holmes stories, he started something that has begun to grow dull. The game has got too elaborate. Questions like the date of *The Norwood Builder* have been upgraded from Sunday morning crossword status to postgraduate complexity. There is no place for the novice in the game, for the man who would never survive the first round of the qualifying examination for the entrance tests to the Baker Street Irregulars. The only thing for the young student is to begin somewhere else, somewhere that has fewer fixed facts and hardly any dates. Here are some notes on G. K. Chesterton's Father Brown stories.

A FEW CRUMBS OF PERSONAL INFORMATION: Father Brown's initial was J. (*The Eye of Apollo*). He was born in Essex (*The Vampire of the Village*). His sister had married into a race of refined but impoverished

We have been unable to find out anything about R. G. G. Price beyond that he has obviously studied—and studied deeply—the Father Brown saga. The result is an extremely interesting article on Chesterton's Father Brown—his personality, his interests, his times, and his relations with the Police.

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squires and had a daughter Elizabeth Fane (*The Worst Crime in the World*). His eyes were large and gray. He had stubbly brown hair and a round face (*The Hammer of God* and elsewhere). Repeated comparisons with turnips prove he was brachycephalic. He carried a stumpy umbrella with a knob, not a crook (*The Fairy Tale of Father Brown*). He smoked a big pipe, which once dropped out of his mouth and broke in three pieces (*The Honor of Israel Gow*). He took red pepper, lemons and brown bread-and-butter with his whitebait (*The Duel of Dr. Hirsch*). He was not unsociable: Frank Harrogate, the great financier's son, vaguely remembered seeing him at the social crushes of some of his Catholic friends (*The Paradise of Thieves*). No doubt it was at these that he learned that Lord Amber, who had gone into wild society in a sort of chivalry, was now paying blackmail to the lowest vultures in London (*The Flying Stars*). He had seen wicked things in a Turkish carpet (*The Wrong Shape*).

SOME NOTES ON FATHER BROWN'S EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: The doctor at Mandeville College asked him curiously, "But you haven't anything particular to do with Oxford?" to which he replied, "I have to do with England" (*The Crime of the Communist*). There is no other reference to formal instruction or the lack of it. He had read Keats (*The Pursuit of Mr. Blue*) and he knew enough about the Encyclical *Rerum Nevarum* to lecture on it (*The Oracle of the Dog*). He had once been fairly good at thinking and could paraphrase any page in Aquinas (*The Secret Garden*). He was familiar enough with the *salvo managio suo* and the *servi regis* to risk hinting that his companions were not (*The Curse of the Golden Cross*). He talked natural history with much unexpected information (*The Perishing of the Pendragons*). He knew the Donkey's Whistle, a thing so foul that Flambeau, though an ex-thief, had never heard of it (*The Blue Cross*). He knew how a wax nose spots in wet weather (*The Head of Caesar*). In the middle of the night in a Mexican road-house of rather loose repute, he sat in the hall and read *Economics of Usury* (*The Scandal of Father Brown*).

A CHECK-LIST OF FATHER BROWN'S ECCLESIASTICAL APPOINTMENTS: He was a curate at Hartlepool (*The Blue Cross*). There were a number of unnamed posts, including one in or very near Belgravia (*The Queer Feet*). Cobhole, Essex, is the most frequently referred to, though he seems to have kept more restrained there and it was not the site of any of his adventures. His work tended to lie in

the north rather than the south of places—North Scarborough (*The Absence of Mr. Glass*), North of South America (*The Resurrection of Father Brown*), North London, St. Mungo's (*The Wrong Shape*). It is probable but not quite certain that the chapel the blacksmith's wife attended in *The Hammer of God* was in Bohun Beacon itself. He once went south to the extent of being attached to St. Francis Xavier's Church, Camberwell (*The Eye of Apollo*). St. Dominic's in *The Mirror of the Magistrate,* might have been a North London church. It was near enough in for a judge to go home after a legal dinner and he had several distinguished neighbors.

Where was the provincial church often referred to? It seems unlikely to have been Scarborough, first because, illogically, "provincial" always sounds inland, and second because it was near the hamlet in *The Song of the Flying Fish,* which was close enough to London to make it worthwhile to take the six-forty-five in the evening and return the next morning. Unless he were on the move to an unprecedented extent, the number of Father Brown's parishes must be limited, and it is reasonable to assume that this provincial church was situated in the place where his rooms were next to the huge block of flats (*The Point of a Pin*). It was probably a small town as it had fringes and a forest and park beyond it. The period was that of the building boom after the First World War —Sir Hubert Sand had served in France. This would fit in with the fact that the hamlet in *The Song of the Flying Fish* was obviously on the point of expanding too: though there were under a dozen inhabitants, there was a bank with a resident manager.

THE DATE OF *The Mistake of the Machine:* The action took place twenty years before the time Father Brown recounted it to his friend Flambeau in the Temple Gardens. At the time he had been chaplain in a Chicago prison. Now, *The Arrow of Heaven* took place immediately on Father Brown's first arrival in America and therefore before he took the chaplaincy. During this episode he had reason to suspect that his young friend Wain had been engaged, "with only too conspicuous success," in evading the last Amendment to the Constitution. This cannot be the Volstead Act, as Chesterton, the recorder of these events, died in 1936, and twenty years, even if the Chicago case had been recorded at the very end of his work, would bring it back to 1916. To bring it back much further would overrun the Amendments of 1913, which concerned Federal Income Tax and the method of election to the Senate, and there is no

stopping place before the much less probable Amendment of 1870 about Negro Voting. If the first arrival was 1913, the chaplaincy could have been held at the very end of the year or the beginning of 1914 and just give time for Father Brown to tell Flambeau about it, but it is a tight fit.

FATHER BROWN AND THE POLICE: Relations were easier than between Sherlock Holmes and Lestrade. For example, a private detective who approached them about the probable murder of his client was referred to Father Brown, whom they described as "an able amateur" (*The Pursuit of Mr. Blue*). Perhaps they relied on using him because they were themselves going through a bad patch; this is shown by *The Secret of Flambeau*—they were still searching for him after he had retired, not only from being a thief but from being a semi-official crime investigator, with offices by the door of Westminister Abbey (*The Eye of Apollo*).

Their goodwill was demonstrated not merely in passing cases on to him but by ready cooperation with his suggestions in cases of their own. In the episode of *The Quick One* he expressed a desire for a certain Scotsman to be found. The police and, for some reason, the postal services worked all night. Traffic was stopped and correspondence intercepted. Finally the rattle and rumble of heavy vehicles was heard outside the bar in which the police had their headquarters. The Scotsman was outside and it had taken five men to handcuff him. Yet, though Father Brown then said he was not a murderer but a witness, the police continued to fawn on him. They even put up with his habit of waiting to produce a solution until the trial of the wrong man was halfway through. In *The Man in the Passage* Father Brown broke the case against the prisoner wide open, although he had been called for the prosecution. He may, perhaps, have been piqued at being treated as a hostile witness. In *The Mirror of the Magistrate* it was only during a break in the proceedings that he mentioned to the police he was going to base the defense on the guilt of the prosecuting counsel.

The advantage that Father Brown had over the police was that he found it much easier to get to the scene of a crime than they did. Their lethargy is amply documented. When a woman fell down the lift-shaft of the block of offices in which Flambeau worked there was time for some minor crime with a will, preliminary investigations by Flambeau and a good deal of theological improvisation by Father Brown. Although a small mob had gathered in the street, it was possible

to be leisurely because, as Father Brown said, it would be half an hour before the police arrived, and this although the disturbance must have been visible across Parliament Square (*The Eye of Apollo*). When a squire disappeared from a small hamlet, causing increasing alarm during the day, his ward's fiancé wired to the police in the evening; the next morning they wired back that they were sending a man down (*The Vanishing of Vaudrey*).

One of the few occasions, if not the only one, when they arrived before Father Brown was in the episode of *The Three Tools of Death*; but this was at a house beside a railway line in Hampstead. Summoned by a message sent by a passing train, the police hung about until Father Brown had been fetched to solve the case. Their only attempt at any kind of action was to send off in pursuit of the wrong man, who turned out to be making for the police station. They chartered a special train to bring him back. Father Brown worked quickly, gave them what they wanted and made off. As he left, "an acquaintance from Highgate" stopped him to say that the coroner had just arrived; but he refused to wait for the inquiry. That could safely be left to the police.

Probably the clearest evidence of the police's lack of mobility is to be found in *The Insoluble Problem*. There was an inn, "The Green Dragon," forty-five miles away on the Casterbury road and the cathedral town of Casterbury itself was a sixty-mile motor drive from Father Brown. It seems to follow that the inn was at the most fifteen miles from the cathedral. When Father Brown and Flambeau drove up to the inn they found a man sitting amid some lumber that consisted mainly of seventeenth century pamphlets. Remarking "Curious circumstances, I may say, curious circumstances indeed," he led them into the garden, where his sister-in-law's grandfather was not only hanging from a tree but had a sword stuck through him. In reply to questions, the man said the old gentleman had been there about half an hour and that he had rung up the police. He added, "But they can hardly be here for several hours. This road-house stands so very remote."

Carry on from here, if you want to; but don't write to me with your findings: I've had my fun.

the chief mourner of marne

by . . . G. K. Chesterton

They called him the nobleman nobody knew. What had made him a recluse? Fear? Remorse? Or his memories?

A BLAZE of lightning blanched the gray woods, tracing all the wrinkled foliage down to the last curled leaf, as if every detail were drawn in silver-point or graven in silver. The same strange trick of lightning by which it seems to record millions of minute things in an instant of time, picked out everything, from the elegant litter of the picnic spread under the spreading tree to the pale lengths of winding road, at the end of which a white car was waiting. In the distance a melancholy mansion with four towers like a castle, which in the gray evening had been but a dim and distant huddle of walls like a crumbling cloud, seemed to spring into the foreground, and stood up with all its embattled roofs and blank and staring windows. And in this, at least, the light had something in it of revelation. For to some of those grouped under the tree that castle was, indeed, a thing faded and almost forgotten, which was to prove its power to spring up again in the foreground of their lives.

As we have said before, G. K. Chesterton was one of the great European Catholic writers of his day, writing on social questions, art, politics and criticism with "dexterity and audacity." He is perhaps best known here as the creator of the Father Brown saga. No airport bookstall was safe from "that clerical Norfolk dumpling," as some described Brown.

From: THE SECRET OF FATHER BROWN
Copyright, 1927, by G. K. Chesterton;
Renewed, 1955, by Oliver Chesterton.

The light also clothed for an instant, in the same silver splendor, at least one human figure that stood up as motionless as one of the towers. It was that of a tall man standing on a rise of ground above the rest, who were mostly sitting on the grass or stooping to gather up the hamper and crockery. He wore a picturesque short cloak or cape clasped with a silver clasp and chain, which blazed like a star when the flash touched it; and something metallic in his motionless figure was emphasized by the fact that his closely curled hair was of the burnished yellow that can be really called gold; and had the look of being younger than his face, which was handsome in hard aquiline fashion, but looked under the strong light, a little wrinkled and withered. Possibly it had suffered from wearing a mask of make-up, for Hugo Romaine was the greatest actor of his day. For that instant of illumination the golden curls and ivory mask and silver ornament made his figure gleam like that of a man in armor; the next instant his figure was a dark and even black silhouette against the sickly gray of the rainy evening sky.

But there was something about its stillness, like that of a statue, that distinguished it from the group at his feet. All the other figures around him had made the ordinary involuntary movement at the unexpected shock of light; for though the skies were rainy it was the first flash of the storm. The only lady present, whose air of carrying gray hair gracefully as if she were really proud of it marked her as a matron of the United States, unaffectedly shut her eyes and uttered a sharp cry. Her English husband, General Outram, a very stolid Anglo-Indian with a bald head and black moustache and whiskers of antiquated pattern looked up with one stiff movement and then resumed his occupation of tidying up. A young man of the name of Mallow, very big and shy, with brown eyes, like a dog's, dropped a cup and apologized awkwardly. A third man, much more dressy, with a resolute head, like an inquisitive terrier's, and gray hair brushed stiffly back, was no other than the great newspaper proprietor, Sir John Cockspur; he cursed freely, but not in an English idiom or accent, for he came from Toronto. But the tall man in the short cloak stood up literally like a statue in the twilight; his eagle face under the full glare had been like the bust of a Roman Emperor, and the carved eyelids had not moved.

A moment after, the dark dome cracked across with thunder, and the statue seemed to come to life. He turned his head over his shoulder and said casually:

"About a minute and a half between the flash and the bang, but I think the storm's coming nearer. A tree is not supposed to be a good umbrella for the lightning, but we shall want it soon for the rain. I think it will be a deluge."

The young man glanced at the lady a little anxiously and said: "Can't we get shelter anywhere? There seems to be a house over there."

"There is a house over there," remarked the general, rather grimly; "but not quite what you'd call a hospitable hotel."

"It's curious," said his wife sadly, "that we should be caught in a storm with no house near but that one, of all others."

Something in her tone seemed to check the younger man, who was both sensitive and comprehending; but nothing of that sort daunted the man from Toronto.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" he asked. "Looks rather like a ruin."

"That place," said the general dryly, "belongs to the Marquis of Marne."

"Gee!" said Sir John Cockspur. "I've heard all about that bird, anyhow; and a queer bird, too. Ran him as a front-page mystery in the *Comet* last year. 'The Nobleman Nobody Knows.' "

"Yes, I've heard of him, too," said young Mallow in a low voice. "There seem to be all sorts of weird stories about why he hides himself like that. I've heard that he wears a mask because he's a leper. But somebody else told me quite seriously that there's a curse on the family; a child born with some frightful deformity that's kept in a dark room."

"The Marquis of Marne has three heads," remarked Romaine gravely. "Once in every three hundred years a three-headed nobleman adorns the family tree. No human being dares approach the accursed house except a silent procession of hatters, sent to provide an abnormal number of hats. But"—and his voice took one of those deep and terrible turns, that could cause such a thrill in the theatre—"my friends, *those hats are of no human shape.*"

The American lady looked at him with a frown and a slight air of distrust, as if that trick of voice had moved her in spite of herself.

"I don't like your ghoulish jokes," she said; "and I'd rather you didn't joke about this, anyhow."

"I hear and obey," replied the actor; "but am I, like the Light Brigade, forbidden even to reason why?"

"The reason," she replied, "is that he isn't the Nobleman Nobody Knows. I know him myself, or, at least, I knew him very well when he was an attaché at Washington thirty years ago, when we were all young. And he didn't wear a mask, at least, he didn't

wear it with me. He wasn't a leper, though he may be almost as lonely. And he had only one head and only one heart, and that was broken."

"Unfortunate love affair, of course," said Cockspur. "I should like that for the *Comet.*"

"I suppose it's a compliment to us," she replied thoughtfully, "that you always assume a man's heart is broken by a woman. But there are other kinds of love and bereavement. Have you never read 'In Memoriam'? Have you never heard of David and Jonathan? What broke poor Marne up was the death of his brother; at least, he was really a first cousin, but had been brought up with him like a brother, and was much nearer than most brothers. James Mair, as the marquis was called when I knew him, was the elder of the two, but he always played the part of worshipper, with Maurice Mair as a god. And by his account, Maurice Mair was certainly a wonder. James was no fool and very good at his own political job; but it seems that Maurice could do that and everything else; that he was a brilliant artist and amateur actor and musician, and all the rest of it. James was very good-looking himself, long and strong and strenuous, with a high-bridged nose; though I suppose the young people would think he looked very quaint with his beard divided into two bushy whiskers in the fashion of those Victorian times. But Maurice was clean-shaven, and, by the portraits shown to me, certainly quite beautiful; though he looked a little more like a tenor than a gentleman ought to look. James was always asking me again and again whether his friend was not a marvel, whether any woman wouldn't fall in love with him, and so on, until it became rather a bore, except that it turned so suddenly into a tragedy. His whole life seemed to be in that idolatry; and one day the idol tumbled down, and was broken like any china doll. A chill caught at the seaside, and it was all over."

"And after that," asked the young man, "did he shut himself up like this?"

"He went abroad at first," she answered, "away to Asia and the Cannibal Islands and Lord knows where. These deadly strokes take different people in different ways. It took him in the way of an utter sundering or severance from everything, even from tradition and as far as possible from memory. He could not bear a reference to the old tie; a portrait or an anecdote or even an association. He couldn't bear the business of a great public funeral. He longed to get away. He stayed away for ten years. I heard some rumor that he had begun to revive a little at the end of the exile; but when he came back to

his own home he relapsed completely. He settled down into religious melancholia, and that's practically madness."

"The priests got hold of him, they say," grumbled the old general. "I know he gave thousands to found a monastery, and lives himself rather like a monk—or, at any rate, a hermit. Can't understand what good they think that will do."

"Goddarned superstition," snorted Cockspur; "that sort of thing ought to be shown up. Here's a man that might have been useful to the Empire and the world, and these vampires get hold of him and suck him dry. I bet with their unnatural notions they haven't even let him marry."

"No, he has never married," said the lady. "He was engaged when I knew him, as a matter of fact, but I don't think it ever came first with him, and I think it went with the rest when everything else went. Like Hamlet and Ophelia—he lost hold of love because he lost hold of life. But I knew the girl; indeed, I know her still. Between ourselves, it was Viola Grayson, daughter of the old admiral. She's never married, either."

"It's infamous! It's infernal!" cried Sir John, bounding up. "It's not only a tragedy, but a crime. I've got a duty to the public, and I mean to see all this nonsensical nightmare . . . in the twentieth century—"

He was almost choked with his own protest, and then, after a silence, the old soldier said:

"Well, I don't profess to know much about those things, but I think these religious people need to study a text which says, 'Let the dead bury their dead.'"

"Only, unfortunately, that's just what it looks like," said his wife with a sigh. "It's just like some creepy story of a dead man burying another dead man, over and over again forever."

"The storm has passed over us," said Romaine, with a rather inscrutable smile. "You will not have to visit the inhospitable house after all."

She suddenly shuddered.

"Oh, I'll never do that again!" she exclaimed.

Mallow was staring at her.

"Again! Have you tried it before?" he cried.

"Well, I did once," she said, with a lightness not without a touch of pride, "but we needn't go back on all that. It's not raining now, but I think we'd better be moving back to the car."

As they moved off in procession Mallow and the general brought up the rear; and the latter said abruptly, lowering his voice:

"I don't want that little cad Cockspur to hear, but as you've asked you'd better know. It's the one thing I can't forgive Marne; but I suppose these monks have drilled him that way. My wife,

who had been the best friend he ever had in America, actually came to that house when he was walking in the garden. He was looking at the ground like a monk, and hidden in a black hood that was really as ridiculous as any mask. She had sent her card in, and stood there in his very path. And he walked past her without a word or a glance, as if she had been stone. He wasn't human; he was like some horrible automaton. She may well call him a dead man."

"It's all very strange," said the young man rather vaguely. "It isn't like—like what I should have expected."

Young Mr. Mallow, when he left that rather dismal picnic, took himself thoughtfully in search of a friend. He did not know any monks, but he knew one priest, whom he was very much concerned to confront with the curious revelations he had heard that afternoon. He felt he would very much like to know the truth about the cruel superstition that hung over the house of Marne, like the black thundercloud he had seen hovering over it.

After being referred from one place to another, he finally ran his friend Father Brown to earth in the house of another friend, a Roman Catholic friend with a large family. He entered somewhat abruptly to find Father Brown sitting on the floor with a serious expression, and attempting to pin the somewhat florid hat belonging to a wax doll on to the head of a Teddy bear.

Mallow felt a faint sense of incongruity; but he was far too full of his problem to put off the conversation if he could help it. He was staggering from a sort of setback in a subconscious process that had been going on for some time. He poured out the whole tragedy of the house of Marne as he had heard it from the general's wife, along with most of the comments of the general and the newspaper proprietor. A new atmosphere of attention seemed to be created with the mention of the newspaper proprietor.

Father Brown neither knew nor cared that his attitudes were comic or commonplace. He continued to sit on the floor, where his large head and short legs make him look very like a baby playing with toys. But there came into his great gray eyes a certain expression that has been seen in the eyes of many men in many centuries through the story of nineteen hundred years; only the men were not generally sitting on floors, but at council tables or the seats of chapters or the thrones of bishops and cardinals; a far-off watchful look, heavy with the humility of a charge too great for men. Something of that anxious and far-reaching look is found in the eyes of sailors and of those who have steered

through so many storms the ship of St. Peter.

"It's very good of you to tell me this," he said. "I'm really awfully grateful, for we may have to do something about it. If it were only people like you and the general, it might be only a private matter; but if Sir John Cockspur is going to spread some sort of scare in his papers—well, he's a Toronto Orangeman, and we can hardly keep out of it."

"But what will you say about it?" asked Mallow anxiously.

"The first thing I should say about it," said Father Brown, "is that, as you tell it, it doesn't sound like life. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we are all pessimistic vampires blighting all human happiness. Suppose I'm a pessimistic vampire." He scratched his nose with the Teddy bear, became faintly conscious of the incongruity, and put it down. "Suppose we do destroy all human and family ties. Why should we entangle a man again in an old family tie just when he showed signs of getting loose from it? Surely it's a little unfair to charge us both with crushing such affection and encouraging such infatuation. I don't see why even a religious maniac should be that particular sort of monomaniac, or how religion could increase that mania, except by brightening it with a little hope."

Then he said after a pause: "I should like to talk to that general of yours."

"It was his wife who told me," said Mallow.

"Yes," replied the other, "but I'm more interested in what he didn't tell you than in what she did."

"You think he knows more than she does?"

"I think he knows more than she says," answered Father Brown. "You tell me he used a phrase about forgiving everything except the rudeness to his wife. After all, what else was there to forgive?"

Father Brown had risen and shaken his shapeless clothes, and stood looking at the young man with screwed-up eyes and a slightly quizzical expression. The next moment he had turned, and picking up his equally shapeless umbrella and large shabby hat, went stumping down the street.

He plodded through a variety of wide streets and squares till he came to a handsome old-fashioned house in the West-End, where he asked the servant if he could see General Outram. After some little palaver he was shown into a study, fitted out less with books than with maps and globes, where the bald-headed black-whiskered Anglo-Indian sat smoking a long, thin black cigar and playing with pins on a chart.

"I am sorry to intrude," said the priest, "and all the more because I can't help the intrusion

looking like interference. I want to speak to you about a private matter, but only in the hope of keeping it private. Unfortunately some people are likely to make it public. I think, General, that you know Sir John Cockspur."

The mass of black moustache and whisker served as a sort of mask for the lower half of the old general's face; it was always hard to see whether he smiled, but his brown eyes often had a certain twinkle.

"Everybody knows him, I suppose," he said. "I don't know him very well."

"Well, you know everybody knows whatever he knows," said Father Brown, smiling, "when he thinks it convenient to print it. And I understand from my friend Mr. Mallow, whom, I think, you know, that Sir John is going to print some scorching anti-clerical articles founded on what he would call the Marne Mystery, 'Monks Drive Marquis Mad,' etc."

"If he is," replied the general, "I don't see why you should come to me about it. I ought to tell you I'm a strong Protestant."

"I'm very fond of strong Protestants," said Father Brown. "I came to you because I was sure you would tell the truth. I hope it is not uncharitable to feel less sure of Sir John Cockspur."

The brown eyes twinkled again, but the general said nothing.

"General," said Father Brown, "suppose Cockspur or his sort were going to make the world ring with tales against your country and your flag. Suppose he said your regiment ran away in battle or your staff were in the pay of the enemy. Would you let anything stand between you and the facts that would refute him? Wouldn't you get on the track of the truth at all costs to anybody? Well, I have a regiment, and I belong to an army. It is being discredited by what I am certain is a fictitious story; but I don't know the true story. Can you blame me for trying to find it out?"

The soldier was silent, and the priest continued:

"I have heard the story Mallow was told yesterday, about Marne retiring with a broken heart through the death of his more than brother. I am sure there was more in it than that. I came to ask you if you know any more."

"No," said the general shortly, "I cannot tell you any more."

"General," said Father Brown with a broad grin, "you would have called me a Jesuit if I had used that equivocation."

The soldier laughed gruffly, and then growled with much greater hostility.

"Well, I won't tell you, then," he said. "What do you say to that?"

"I only say," said the priest

mildly, "that in that case I shall have to tell you."

The brown eyes stared at him; but there was no twinkle in them now. He went on:

"You compel me to state, less sympathetically perhaps than you could, why it is obvious that there is more behind. I am quite sure the marquis has better cause for his brooding and secretiveness than merely having lost an old friend. I doubt whether priests have anything to do with it; I don't even know if he's a convert or merely a man comforting his conscience with charities; but I'm sure he's something more than a chief mourner. Since you insist, I will tell you one or two of the things that made me think so.

"First, it was stated that James Mair was engaged to be married, but somehow became unattached again after the death of Maurice Mair. Why should an honorable man break off his engagement merely because he was depressed by the death of a third party? He's much more likely to have turned for consolation to it; but, anyhow, he was bound in decency to go through with it."

The general was biting his black moustache, and his brown eyes had become very watchful and even anxious, but he did not answer.

"A second point," said Father Brown, frowning at the table, "James Mair was always asking his lady friend whether his cousin Maurice was not very fascinating, and whether women would not admire him. I don't know if it occurred to the lady that there might be another meaning to that inquiry."

The general got to his feet and began to walk or stamp about the room.

"Oh, damn it all," he said, but without any air of animosity.

"The third point," went on Father Brown, "is James Mair's curious manner of mourning—destroying all relics, veiling all portraits, and so on. It does sometimes happen, I admit; it might mean mere affectionate bereavement. But it might mean something else."

"Confound you," said the other, "how long are you going on piling this up?"

"The fourth and fifth points are pretty conclusive," said the priest calmly, "especially if you take them together. The first is that Maurice Mair seems to have had no funeral in particular, considering he was a cadet of a great family. He must have been buried hurriedly; perhaps secretly. And the last point is that James Mair instantly disappeared to foreign parts; fled, in fact, to the ends of the earth.

"And so," he went on, still in the same soft voice, "when you would blacken my religion to brighten the story of the pure and perfect affection of two brothers, it seems—"

"Stop!" cried Outram in a tone like a pistol shot. "I must tell you more, or you will fancy worse. Let me tell you one thing to start with. It was a fair fight."

"Ah," said Father Brown, and seemed to exhale a huge breath.

"It was a duel," said the other. "It was probably the last duel fought in England, and it is long ago now."

"That's better," said Father Brown. "Thank God; that's a great deal better."

"Better than the ugly things you thought of, I suppose?" said the general gruffly. "Well, it's all very well for you to sneer at the pure and perfect affection; but it was true for all that. James Mair really was devoted to his cousin, who'd grown up with him like a younger brother. Elder brothers and sisters do sometimes devote themselves to a child like that, especially when he's a sort of infant phenomenon. But James Mair was the sort of simple character in whom even hate is in a sense unselfish. I mean that even when his tenderness turns to rage it is still objective, directed outwards to its objects; he isn't conscious of himself. Now poor Maurice Mair was just the opposite. He was far more friendly and popular; but his success had made him live in a house of mirrors. He was first in every sort of sport and art and accomplishment; he nearly always won and took his winning amiably. But if ever by any chance he lost, there was just a glimpse of something not so amiable; he was a little jealous. I needn't tell you the whole miserable story of how he was a little jealous of his cousin's engagement; how he couldn't keep his restless vanity from interfering. It's enough to say that one of the few things in which James Mair was admittedly ahead of him was marksmanship with a pistol; and with that the tragedy ended."

"You mean the tragedy began," replied the priest. "The tragedy of the survivor. I thought he did not need any monkish vampires to make him miserable."

"To my mind he's more miserable than he need be," said the general. "After all, as I say, it was a ghastly tragedy, but it was a fair fight. And Jim had great provocation."

"How do you know all this?" asked the priest.

"I know it because I saw it," answered Outram stolidly. "I was James Mair's second and I saw Maurice Mair shot dead on the sands before my very eyes."

"I wish you would tell me more about it," said Father Brown reflectively. "Who was Maurice Mair's second?"

"He had a more distinguished backing," replied the general grimly. "Hugo Romaine was his second; the great actor, you know. Maurice was mad on acting and

had taken up Romaine (who was then a rising but still struggling man), and financed the fellow and his ventures, in return for taking lessons from the professional in his own hobby of amateur acting. But Romaine was then, I suppose, practically dependent on his rich friend, though he's richer now than any aristocrat. So his serving as second proves very little about what he thought of the quarrel. They fought in the English fashion, with only one second apiece; I wanted at least to have a surgeon, but Maurice boisterously refused it, saying the fewer people knew the better, and at the worst we could immediately get help. 'There's a doctor in the village not half a mile away,' he said: 'I know him and he's got the fastest horse in the country. He could be brought here in no time; but there's no need to bring him here till we know.' Well, we all knew that Maurice ran most risks, as the pistol was not his weapon; so when he refused aid nobody liked to ask for it. The duel was fought on a flat stretch of sand on the east coast of Scotland; and both the sight and sound of it were masked from the hamlets inland by a long rampart of sandhills patched with rank grass; probably part of the links, though in those days no Englishman had heard of golf. There was one deep, crooked cranny in the sandhills through which we came out on the sands. I can see them now, first a wide strip of dead yellow, and beyond a narrower strip of dark red; a dark red that seemed already like the long shadow of a deed of blood.

"The thing itself seemed to happen with horrible speed; as if a whirlwind had struck the sand. With the very crack of sound Maurice Mair seemed to spin like a teetotum and pitch upon his face like a ninepin. And queerly enough, while I'd been worrying about him up to that moment, the instant he was dead all my pity was for the man who killed him; as it is to this day and hour. I knew that, with that, the whole huge terrible pendulum of my friend's lifelong love would swing back; and that whatever cause others might find to pardon him, he would never pardon himself for ever and ever. And so, somehow, the really vivid thing, the picture that burns in my memory so that I can't forget it, is not that of the catastrophe, the smoke and the flash and the falling figure. That seemed to be all over, like the noise that wakes a man up. What I saw, what I shall always see, is poor Jim hurrying across towards his fallen friend and foe, his brown beard looking black against the ghastly pallor of his face, with its high features cut out against the sea; and the frantic gestures with which he waved me to run for the surgeon in the hamlet behind the sand-

hills. He had dropped his pistol as he ran; he had a glove in one hand and the loose and fluttering fingers of it seemed to elongate and emphasize his wild pantomime of pointing or hailing for help. That is the picture that really remains with me; and there is nothing else in that picture, except the striped background of sands and sea and the dark, dead body lying still as a stone and the dark figure of the dead man's second standing grim and motionless against the horizon."

"Did Romaine stand motionless?" asked the priest. "I should have thought he would have run even quicker towards the corpse."

"Perhaps he did when I had left," replied the general. "I took in that undying picture in an instant and the next instant I had dived among the sandhills, and was far out of sight of the others. Well, poor Maurice had made a good choice in the matter of doctors; though the doctor came too late, he came quicker than I should have thought possible. This village surgeon was a very remarkable man, red-haired, irascible, but extraordinarily strong in promptitude and presence of mind. I saw him but for a flash as he leapt on his horse and went thundering away to the scene of death, leaving me far behind. But in that flash I had so strong a sense of his personality that I wished to God he had really been called in before the duel began; for I believe on my soul he would have prevented it somehow. As it was, he cleaned up the mess with marvelous swiftness; long before I could trail back to the seashore on my two feet, his impetuous practicality had managed everything; the corpse was temporarily buried in the sandhills and the unhappy homicide had been persuaded to do the only thing he could do—to flee for his life. He slipped along the coast till he came to a port and managed to get out of the country. You know the rest; poor Jim remained abroad for many years; later, when the whole thing had been hushed up or forgotten, he returned to his dismal castle and automatically inherited the title. I have never seen him from that day to this, and yet I know what is written in red letters in the inmost darkness of his brain."

"I understand," said Father Brown, "that some of you have made efforts to see him?"

"My wife never relaxed her efforts," said the general. "She refuses to admit that such a crime ought to cut a man off forever; and I confess I am inclined to agree with her. Eighty years before it would have been thought quite normal; and really it was manslaughter rather than murder. My wife is a great friend of the unfortunate lady who was the occasion of the quarrel; and she has an idea that if Jim would consent to see Viola Grayson once

again, and receive her assurance that old quarrels are buried, it might restore his sanity. My wife is calling a sort of council of old friends tomorrow, I believe. She is very energetic."

Father Brown was playing with the pins that lay beside the general's map; he seemed to listen rather absent-mindedly. He had the sort of mind that sees things in pictures; and the picture which had colored even the prosaic mind of the practical soldier took on tints yet more significant and sinister in the more mystical mind of the priest. He saw the dark red desolation of sand, the very hue of Aceldama, and the dead man lying in a dark heap and the slayer stooping as he ran, gesticulating with a glove in demented remorse, and always his imagination came back to the third thing that he could not yet fit into any human picture: the second of the slain man standing motionless and mysterious, like a dark statue on the edge of the sea. It might seem to some a detail; but for him it was that stiff figure that stood up like a standing note of interrogation.

Why had not Romaine moved instantly? It was the natural thing for a second to do in common humanity let alone friendship. Even if there were some double dealing or darker motive not yet understood, one would think it would be done for the sake of appearances. Anyhow, when the thing was all over, it would be natural for the second to stir long before the other second had vanished beyond the sandhills.

"Does this man Romaine move very slowly?" he asked.

"It's queer you should ask that," answered Outram, with a sharp glance. "No, as a matter of fact he moves very quickly when he moves at all. But curiously enough, I was just thinking that only this afternoon I saw him stand exactly like that, during the thunderstorm. He stood in that silver-clasped cape of his, and with one hand on his hip, exactly in every line as he stood on those bloody sands long ago. The lightning blinded us all, but he did not blink. When it was dark again he was standing there still."

"I suppose he isn't standing there now?" inquired Father Brown. "I mean I suppose he moved sometime?"

"No, he moved quite sharply when the thunder came," replied the other. "He seemed to have been waiting for it, for he told us the exact time of the interval. . . . Is anything the matter?"

"I've pricked myself with one of your pins," said Father Brown. "I hope I haven't damaged it." But his eyes had snapped and his mouth abruptly shut.

"Are you ill?" inquired the general, staring at him.

"No," answered the priest, "I'm only not quite so stoical as

your friend Romaine. I can't help blinking when I see light."

He turned to gather up his hat and umbrella; but when he had got to the door he seemed to remember something and turned back. Coming up close to Outram, he gazed up into his face with a rather helpless expression, as of a dying fish, and made a motion as if to hold him by the waistcoat.

"General," he almost whispered, "for God's sake don't let your wife and that other woman insist on seeing Marne again. Let sleeping dogs lie or you'll unleash all the hounds of hell."

The general was left alone with a look of bewilderment in his brown eyes, as he sat down again to play with his pins.

Even greater, however, was the bewilderment which attended the successive stages of the benevolent conspiracy of the general's wife, who had assembled her little group of sympathizers to storm the castle of the misanthrope. The first surprise she encountered was the unexplained absence of one of the actors in the ancient tragedy. When they assembled by agreement at a quiet hotel quite near the castle, there was no sign of Hugo Romaine, until a belated telegram from a lawyer told them that the great actor had suddenly left the country. The second surprise, when they began the bombardment by sending up word to the castle with an urgent request for an interview, was the figure which came forth from those gloomy gates to receive the deputation in the name of the noble owner. It was no such figure as they would have conceived suitable to those somber avenues or those almost feudal formalities. It was not some stately steward or majordomo, nor even a dignified butler or tall and ornamental footman. The only figure that came out of the cavernous castle doorways was the short and shabby figure of Father Brown.

"Look here," he said, in his simple, bothered fashion. "I told you you'd much better leave him alone. He knows what he's doing and it'll only make everybody unhappy."

Lady Outram, who was accompanied by a tall and quietly dressed lady, still very handsome, presumably the original Miss Grayson, looked at the little priest with cold contempt.

"Really, sir," she said, "this is a very private occasion, and I don't understand what you have to do with it."

"Trust a priest to have to do with a private occasion," snarled Sir John Cockspur. "Don't you know they live behind the scenes like rats behind the wainscot burrowing their way into every body's private rooms? See how he's already in possession of poor Marne." Sir John was slightly

sulky, as his aristocratic friends had persuaded him to give up the great scoop of publicity in return for the privilege of being really inside a society secret. It never occurred to him to ask himself whether *he* was at all like a rat in a wainscot.

"Oh, that's all right," said Father Brown, with the impatience of anxiety. "I've talked it over with the marquis and the only priest he's ever had anything to do with; his clerical tastes have been much exaggerated. I tell you he knows what he's about; and I do implore you all to leave him alone."

"You mean to leave him to this living death of moping and going mad in a ruin!" cried Lady Outram, in a voice that shook a little. "And all because he had the bad luck to shoot a man in a duel more than a quarter of a century ago. Is that what you call Christian charity?"

"Yes," answered the priest stolidly, "that is what I call Christian charity."

"It's about all the Christian charity you'll ever get out of these priests," cried Cockspur bitterly. "That's their only idea of pardoning a poor fellow for a piece of folly; to wall him up alive and starve him to death with fasts and penances and pictures of hell-fire. And all because a bullet went wrong."

"Really, Father Brown," said General Outram, "do you honestly think he deserves this? Is that your Christianity?"

"Surely the true Christianity," pleaded his wife more gently, "is that which knows all and pardons all; the love that can remember —and forget."

"Father Brown," said young Mallow, very earnestly, "I generally agree with what you say; but I'm hanged if I can follow you here. A shot in a duel, followed instantly by remorse, is not such an awful offense."

"I admit," said Father Brown dully, "that I take a more serious view of his offense."

"God soften your hard heart," said the strange lady, speaking for the first time. "I am going to speak to my old friend."

Almost as if her voice had raised a ghost in that great gray house, something stirred within and a figure stood in the dark doorway at the top of the great stone flight of steps. It was clad in dead black, but there was something wild about the blanched hair and something in the pale features that was like the wreck of a marble statue.

Viola Grayson began calmly to move up the great flight of steps; and Outram muttered in his thick black moustache: "He won't cut her dead as he did my wife, I fancy."

Father Brown, who seemed in a collapse of resignation, looked up at him for a moment.

"Poor Marne has enough on

his conscience," he said. "Let us acquit him of what we can. At least he never cut your wife."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He never knew her," said Father Brown.

As they spoke the tall lady proudly mounted the last step and came face to face with the Marquis of Marne. His lips moved, but something happened before he could speak.

A scream rang across the open space and went wailing away in echoes along those hollow walls. By the abruptness and agony with which it broke from the woman's lips it might have been a mere inarticulate cry. But it was an articulated word; and they all heard it with a horrible distinctness.

"Maurice!"

"What is it, dear?" cried Lady Outram, and began to run up the steps; for the other woman was swaying as if she might fall down the whole stone flight. Then she faced about and began to descend, all bowed and shrunken and shuddering. "Oh, my God," she was saying. "Oh, my God . . . it isn't Jim at all . . . it's Maurice!"

"I think, Lady Outram," said the priest gravely, "you had better go with your friend."

As they turned a voice fell on them like a stone from the top of the stone stair, a voice that might have come out of an open grave. It was hoarse and unnatural, like the voices of men who are left alone with wild birds on desert islands. It was the voice of the Marquis of Marne, and it said: "Stop!"

"Father Brown," he said, "before your friends disperse I authorize you to tell them all I have told you. Whatever follows, I will hide from it no longer."

"You are right," said the priest, "and it shall be counted to you.

"Yes," said Father Brown quietly to the questioning company afterwards. "He has given me the right to speak; but I will not tell it as he told me, but as I found it out for myself. Well, I knew from the first that the blighting monkish influence was all nonsense out of novels. Our people might possibly in certain cases encourage a man to go regularly into a monastery, but certainly not to hang about in a medieval castle. In the same way, they certainly wouldn't want him to dress up as a monk when he wasn't a monk. But it struck me that he might himself want to wear a monk's hood or even mask. I had heard of him as a mourner, and then as a murderer; but already I had hazy suspicions that his reason for hiding might not only be concerned with what he was, but with who he was.

"Then came the general's vivid description of the duel; and the most vivid thing in it to me was the figure of Mr. Romaine in the background; it was vivid because

it was in the background. Why did the general leave behind him on the sand a dead man, whose friend stood yards away from him like a stock or a stone? Then I heard something, a mere trifle, about a trick habit that Romaine has of standing quite still when he is waiting for something to happen; as he waited for the thunder to follow the lightning. Well, that automatic trick in this case betrayed everything. Hugo Romaine, on that old occasion, also was waiting for something."

"But it was all over," said the general. "What could he have been waiting for?"

"He was waiting for the duel," said Father Brown.

"But I tell you I saw the duel!" cried the general.

"And I tell you you didn't see the duel," said the priest.

"Are you mad?" demanded the other. "Or why should you think I am blind?"

"Because you were blinded—that you might not see," said the priest. "Because you are a good man and God had mercy on your innocence, and he turned your face away from that unnatural strife. He set a wall of sand and silence between you and what really happened on that horrible red shore, abandoned to the raging spirits of Judas and of Cain."

"Tell us what happened!" gasped the lady impatiently.

"I will tell it as I found it," proceeded the priest. "The next thing I found was that Romaine, the actor, had been training Maurice Mair in all the tricks of the trade of acting. I once had a friend who went in for acting. He gave me a very amusing account of how his first week's training consisted entirely of falling down; of learning how to fall flat without a stagger, as if he were stone dead."

"God have mercy on us!" cried the general, and gripped the arms of his chair as if to rise.

"Amen," said Father Brown. "You told me how quickly it seemed to come; in fact. Maurice fell before the bullet flew and lay perfectly still, waiting. And his wicked friend and teacher stood also in the background, waiting."

"We are waiting," said Cockspur, "and I feel as if I couldn't wait."

"James Mair, already broken with remorse, rushed across to the fallen man and bent over to lift him up. He had thrown away his pistol like an unclean thing; but Maurice's pistol still lay under his hand and it was undischarged. Then as the elder man bent over the younger, the younger lifted himself on his left arm and shot the elder through the body. He knew he was not so good a shot; but there was no question of missing the heart at that distance."

The rest of the company had risen and stood staring down at

the narrator with pale faces. "Are you sure of this?" asked Sir John at last, in a thick voice.

"I am sure of it," said Father Brown, "and now I leave Maurice Mair, the present Marquis of Marne, to your Christian charity. You have told me something today about Christian charity. You seemed to me to give it almost too large a place; but how fortunate it is for poor sinners like this man that you err so much on the side of mercy, and are ready to be reconciled to all mankind."

"Hang it all," exploded the general, "if you think I'm going to be reconciled to a filthy viper like that, I tell you I wouldn't say a word to save him from hell. I said I could pardon a regular decent duel, but of all the treacherous assassins—"

"He ought to be lynched," cried Cockspur excitedly. "He ought to burn alive. And if there is such a thing as burning forever, he jolly well—"

"I wouldn't touch him with a barge pole myself," said Mallow.

"There is a limit to human charity," said Lady Outram, trembling all over.

"There is," said Father Brown dryly, "and that is the real difference between human charity and Christian charity. You must forgive me if I was not altogether crushed by your contempt for my uncharitableness today; or by the lectures you read me about pardon for every sinner. For it seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes, but rather as conventions. So you tolerate a conventional duel, just as you tolerate a conventional divorce. You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven."

"But hang it all," cried Mallow, "you don't expect us to be able to pardon a vile thing like this?"

"No," said the priest, "but *we* have to be able to pardon it."

He stood up abruptly and looked round at them.

"We have to touch such men, not with a barge pole, but with a benediction," he said. "We have to say the word that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them. Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favorite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes; and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon. Leave us with the men who commit the mean and revolting and real crimes; mean as St. Peter when the cock crew, and yet the dawn came."

"The dawn," repeated Mallow

doubtfully. "You mean hope—for *him?*"

"Yes," replied the other. "Let me ask you one question. You are great ladies and men of honor and secure of yourselves; you would never, you can tell yourselves, stoop to such squalid treason as that. But tell me this. If any of you had so stooped, which of you, years afterwards, when you were old and rich and safe, would have been driven by conscience or confessor to tell such a story of yourself? You say you could not commit so base a crime. Could you confess so base a crime?"

The others gathered their possessions together and drifted by twos and threes out of the room in silence. And Father Brown, also in silence, went back to the melancholy castle of Marne.

NOT QUITE EVERYTHING

THE CROWD AT Spitter Scott's Kegler Kingdom watched the newly-installed automatic pin spotters with appreciative eyes. These were bowlers and they were welcoming the smooth working machines that meant an end to their dependence on tired or temperamental pinboys.

Only one man looked at the fascinating machines without apparent joy, and still he was the center of attention. He was Spitter Scott, nicknamed for the things he could make a baseball do back in the days when the spitball still was legal.

Now the Spitter not only owned the bowling alleys that bore his name; he also had carried over to his new sport the reputation he had made in baseball as a "money player" when the chips were down. The Spitter seldom dropped a bet, friendly or substantial, when challenged to a match game by some optimistic bowler.

"I don't know why you waited so long to have these pinspotters installed," said a voice from one of the leagues that had convinced Spitter he must get the machines or lose their business. "They're great! Just think—no more pinboy problems. These babies can do everything."

Not quite everything, the sad-faced Spitter thought wryly. This would be the second time a form of the spitball had been pulled out from under him. It would be a cold day down below before he could count on an automatic pinspotter to do what his favorite pinboy had done in the pits for years—slap a little glycerine on an opponent's ball when the match games got too close.

Not a lot of glycerine you understand. Just a speck so that before it could wear off that spot touching the alley would edge the ball out of the groove enough to miss the pocket and spoil a strike.

—Bud Johns

a very small homicide

by . . . Evan Hunter

The bigger this got, the better the chances of the papers finding it out — and a killer might escape.

HER face was small and chubby, the eyes blue and innocently rounded, but seeing nothing. Her body rested on the seat of the wooden bench, one arm twisted awkwardly beneath her soft little body.

The candles near the altar flickered and cast their dancing shadows on her face. There was a faded pink blanket wrapped around her, and against the whiteness of her throat were the purple bruises that told us she'd been strangled.

Her mouth was open, exposing two small teeth and the beginnings of a third.

She was no more than eight months old.

The church was quiet and immense, with early morning sunlight lighting the stained glass windows. Dust motes filtered down the long, slanting columns of sunlight, and Father Barron stood tall and darkly somber at the end of the pew.

"This is the way you found her, Father?" I asked.

"Yes. Just that way." The

***Evan** Hunter, undoubtedly best known as the author of the best selling* THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE, *has been called "one of the most prolific writers since the heyday of the pulps." The present story is one of the best examples of his work with the detective form, and a good study of police procedure.*

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priest's eyes were a deep brown against the chalky whiteness of his face. "I didn't touch her."

Pat Travers scratched his jaw and stood up, reaching for the pad in his back pocket. His mouth was set in a tight, angry line. Pat had three children of his own. "What time was this, Father Barron?"

"At about five-thirty. We have a six o'clock mass, and I came out to see that the altar was prepared. Our altar boys go to school, you understand, and they usually arrive at the last minute. I generally attend to the altar myself."

"No sexton?" Pat asked.

"Yes, we have a sexton, but he doesn't arrive until about eight every morning. He comes earlier on Sunday mornings."

I nodded while Pat jotted the information in his pad. "How did you happen to see her, Father?"

"I was walking to the back of the church to open the doors. I saw something, in the pew, and I . . . well, at first I thought it was just a package someone had forgotten. When I came closer, I saw it was . . . was a baby." He sighed deeply and shook his head.

"The doors were locked, Father?"

"No. No, they're never locked. This is God's house, you know. They were simply closed. I was walking back to open them. I usually open them before the first mass in the morning."

"They were unlocked all night?"

"Yes, of course."

"I see." I looked down at the baby again. "You wouldn't know who she is, would you, Father?"

Father Barron shook his head again. "I'm afraid not. She may have been baptized here, but infants all look alike; you know. It would be different if I saw her every Sunday. But . . ." He spread his hands wide in a helpless gesture.

Pat nodded, and kept looking at the dead child. "We'll have to send some of the boys to take pictures and prints, Father. I hope you don't mind. And we have to chalk up the pew. It shouldn't take too long, and we'll have the body out as soon as possible."

Father Barron looked down at the dead baby. He crossed himself and said, "God have mercy on her soul."

We filed a report back at headquarters, and then sent out for some coffee. Pat had already detailed the powder and flash bulb boys, and there wasn't much we could do until they were through and the body had been autopsied.

I was sipping at my hot coffee when the buzzer on my desk sounded. I pushed down the toggle and said, "Levine, here."

"Dave, want to come into my office a minute? This is the lieutenant."

"Sure thing," I told him. I put down the cup, said, "Be right back" to Pat, and headed for the Old Man's office.

He was sitting behind his desk with our report in his hands. He glanced up when I came in and said, "Sit down, Dave. Hell of a thing, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said.

"I'm holding it back from the papers, Dave. If this breaks, we'll have every mother in the city telephoning us. You know what that means?"

"You want it fast."

"I want it damned fast. I'm pulling six men from other jobs to help you and Pat. I don't want to go to another precinct for help because the bigger this gets, the better its chances of breaking into print. I want it quiet and small, and I want it fast." He stopped and shook his head, and then growled, "Damn him!"

"We're waiting for the body to come in now," I said. "As soon as we get some reports, we may be able to learn something."

"What did it look like to you?"

"Strangulation. It's there in the report."

The lieutenant glanced at the typewritten sheet in his hands, mumbled "uhm" and then said, "While you're waiting, you'd better start checking the missing persons calls."

"Pat's doing that now, sir."

"Good, good. You know what to do, Dave. Just get me an answer to it fast."

"We'll do our best, sir."

He leaned back in his leather chair. "A little girl, huh?" He shook his head. "Damn shame. Damn shame." He kept shaking his head and looking at the report, and then he dropped the report on his desk and said, "Here're the boys you've got to work with." He handed me a typewritten list of names. "All good, Dave. Get me results."

"I'll try, sir," I said.

Pat had a list of calls on his desk when I went outside again. I picked it up and glanced through it rapidly. A few older kids were lost and there had been the usual frantic pleas from mothers who should have watched their kids more carefully in the first place.

"What's this?" I asked. I put my forefinger alongside a call clocked in at eight-fifteen. A Mrs. Wilkes had phoned to say she'd left her baby outside in the carriage, and the carriage was gone.

"They found the kid," Pat said. "Her older daughter had taken the kid for a walk. There's nothing there, Dave."

"The Old Man wants action, Pat. The photos come in yet?"

"Over there." He indicated a pile of glossy photographs on his desk. I picked up the stack and thumbed through it. They'd shot the baby from every conceivable angle, and there were two good

closeups of her face. I fanned the pictures out on my desk top and buzzed the lab. I recognized Caputo's voice at once.

"Any luck, Cappy?"

"That you, Dave?"

"Yep."

"You mean on the baby?"

"Yeah."

"The boys brought in a whole slew of stuff. A pew collects a lot of prints, Dave."

"Anything we can use?"

"I'm running them through now. If we get anything, I'll let you know."

"Fine. I want the baby's footprints taken, and a stat sent to every hospital in the state."

"Okay. It's going to be tough if the baby was born outside, though."

"Maybe we'll be lucky. Put the stat on the machine, will you? And tell them we want immediate replies."

"I'll have it taken care of, Dave."

"Good. Cappy, we're going to need all the help we can get. So . . ."

"I'll do all I can."

"Thanks. Let me know if you get anything."

"I will. So long, Dave; I've got work."

He clicked off, and I leaned back and lit a cigarette. Pat picked up one of the baby's photos and studied it glumly.

"When they get him, they should cut off his . . ."

"He'll get the chair," I said. "That's for sure."

"I'll pull the switch. Personally. Just ask me. Just ask me and I'll do it."

I nodded. "Except one thing, Pat."

"What's that?"

"We got to catch him first."

The baby was stretched out on the long white table when I went down to see Doc Edwards. A sheet covered the corpse, and Doc was busy filling out a report. I looked over his shoulder:

POLICE DEPARTMENT
City of New York

Date: June 12, 1953

From: Commanding Officer,
Charles R. Brandon,
37th Precinct

To: Chief Medical Examiner
SUBJECT: DEATH OF
Baby girl (unidentified)

1. Please furnish information on items checked below in connection of death of the above named. *Body was found on June 12, 1953, at Church of the Holy Mother, 1220 Benson Avenue, Bronx, New York.*

Autopsy performed: examination made. *Yes.*

By: *Dr. James L. Edwards, Fordham Hospital Mortuary, Bronx.*

Date: *June 12, 1953*
Where? *Bronx County*
Cause of death: *Broken neck.*

Doc Edwards looked up from the typewriter.

"Not nice, Dave."

"No, not nice at all." I saw that he was ready to type in the *"Result of chemical analysis"* space. "Anything else on her?"

"Not much. Dried tears on her face. Urine on her abdomen, buttocks and genitals. Traces of a zinc oxide ointment, and petroleum jelly there, too. That's about it."

"Time of death?"

"I'd put it at about three A.M. last night."

"Uh-huh."

"You want a guess?"

"Sure."

"Somebody doesn't like his sleep to be disturbed by a crying kid. That's my guess."

I said, "Nobody likes his sleep disturbed, Doc. What's the zinc oxide and petroleum jelly for? That normal?"

"Yeah, sure. Lots of mothers use it. Mostly for minor irritations. Urine burn, diaper rash, that sort of thing."

"I see."

"This shouldn't be too tough, Dave. You know who the kid is yet?"

"We're working on that now."

"Well, good luck."

"Thanks."

I turned to go, and Doc Edwards began pecking at the typewriter again, completing the autopsy report.

There was good news waiting for me back at the precinct. Pat came over with a smile on his face, and a thick sheet of paper in his hands.

"Here's the ticket," he said.

I took the paper, and looked at it. It was the photostat of a birth certificate.

U. S. NAVAL HOSPITAL
St. Albans, N. Y.

Birth Certificate

This certifies that *Louise Ann Dreiser* was born to *Alice Dreiser* in this hospital at 4:15 P.M. on the *tenth* day of *November,* 1952. Weight 7 lbs. 6 ozs. In witness whereof, the said hospital has caused this certificate to be issued, properly signed and the seal of the hospital hereunto affixed.

Gregory Freeman,
LTJG MC USN
attending physician
Frederick L. Mann,
CAPTAIN MC
commanding officer USN

"Here's how they got it," Pat said, handing me another stat. I looked at it quickly. It was the reverse side of the birth certificate.

Baby's footprint
(Permanent Evidence of Identity)
Left foot Right foot

Sex of child female
Weight at birth 7 lbs. 6 ozs.

Certificate of birth should be carefully preserved as record of value for future use.

1—To identify relationship
2—To establish age to enter school

There were several more good reasons why a birth certificate should be kept in the sugar bowl, and then below that:

Official registration at
148-15 Archer Avenue,
Jamaica, L. I., N. Y.

"Alice Dreiser," I said.

"That's the mother. Prints and all. I've already sent a copy down to Cappy to check against the ones they lifted from there in the pew."

"Fine. Pick one of the boys from the list the Old Man gave us, Pat. Tell him to get whatever he can on Alice Dreiser and her husband. They have to be sailors or relations to get admitted to a naval hospital, don't they?"

"Yeah. You've got to prove dependency." He nodded.

"Fine. Get the guy's last address and we'll try to run down the woman, or him, or both. Get whoever you pick to call right away, will you?"

"Right. Why pick anyone? I'll make the call myself."

"No, I want you to check the phone book for Alice Dreiser. In the meantime, I'll be looking over the baby's garments."

"You'll be in the lab?"

"Yeah. Buzz me, Pat."

"Right."

Caputo had the garments separated and tagged when I got there.

"You're not going to get much out of these," he told me.

"No luck, huh?"

He held out the pink blanket. "*Black River Mills.* A big trade name. You can probably buy it in any retail shop in the city." He picked up the small pink sweater with the pearl buttons. "*Toddler's, Inc.* — ditto. The socks have no markings at all. The undershirt came from *Gilman's* here in the city. It's the largest department store in the world, so you can imagine how many of these they sell every day. The cotton pajamas were bought there, too."

"No shoes?"

"No shoes."

"What about the diaper?"

"What about it? It's a plain diaper. No label. You got any kids, Dave?"

"One."

"You ever see a diaper with a label?"

"I don't recall seeing any."

"If you did, it wasn't in it long. Diapers take a hell of a beating, Dave."

"Maybe. You can check that."

"Safety pins?"

"Two. No identifying marks. Look like five and dime stuff."

"Any prints?"

"Yeah. There are smudged prints on the pins, but there's a good thumb print on one of the pajama snaps."

"Whose?"

"It matches the right thumb print on the stat you sent down. Mrs. Dreiser's."

"Uh-huh. Did you check her prints against the ones from the pew?"

"Nothing, Dave. None are hers, anyway."

"Okay, Cappy. Thanks a lot."

Cappy shrugged. "I get paid," he said. He grinned and waved as I walked out and headed upstairs again. I met Pat in the hallway, coming down to the lab after me.

"What's up?" I asked.

"I called the Naval Hospital. They gave me the last address they had for the guy. His name is Carl Dreiser, lived at 831 East 217th Street, Bronx, when the baby was born."

"How come?"

"He was a yeoman, working downtown on Church Street. Lived with his wife uptown, got an allotment, you know the story."

"Yeah. So?"

"I sent Artie to check at that address. He should be calling in soon now."

"What about the sailor?"

"I called the Church Street office, spoke to the Commanding Officer, Captain . . ." He consulted a slip of paper. "Captain Thibot. This Dreiser was working there back in November. He got orders in January, reported aboard the *U.S.S. Hanfield,* DD 981 at the Brooklyn Navy Yard on January 5th of this year."

"Where is he now?"

"That's the problem, Dave."

"What kind of problem?"

"The *Hanfield* was sunk off Pyongyang in March."

"Oh."

"Dreiser is listed as killed in action."

I didn't say anything. I nodded, and waited.

"A telegram was sent to Mrs. Dreiser at the Bronx address. The War Department says the telegram was delivered and signed for by Alice Dreiser."

"Let's wait for Artie to call in," I said.

We ordered more coffee and waited. Pat had checked the phone book and there'd been no listing for either Carl or Alice Dreiser. He'd had a list typed of every Dreiser in the city, it ran longer than my arm.

"Why didn't you ask the Navy what his parents' names are?" I said.

"I did. Both parents are dead."

"Who does he list as next of kin?"

"His wife. Alice Dreiser."

"Great."

In a half-hour, Artie called in. There was no Alice Dreiser living at the Bronx address. The landlady said she'd lived there until April and had left without giving a forwarding address. Yes, she'd had a baby daughter. I told Artie to keep the place staked out, and then buzzed George Tabin and told him to check the Post Office Department for any forwarding address.

When he buzzed back in twenty minutes, he said, "Nothing, Dave. Nothing at all."

We split the available force of men, and I managed to wangle four more men from the lieutenant. Half of us began checking on the Dreisers listed in the phone directories, and the rest of us began checking the diaper services.

The first diaper place I called on had a manager who needed only a beard to look like Santa Claus. He greeted me affably and offered all his assistance. Unfortunately, they'd never had a customer named Alice Dreiser.

At my fourth stop, I got what looked like a lead.

I spoke directly to the vice-president, and he listened intently.

"Perhaps," he said, "perhaps." He was a big man, with a wide waist, a gold watch chain spraddling it. He leaned over and pushed down on his intercom buzzer.

"Yes, sir?"

"Bring in a list of our customers. Starting with November of 1952."

"Sir?"

"Starting with November of 1952."

"Yes, sir."

We talked about the diaper business in general until the list came, and then he handed it to me and I began checking off the names. There were a hell of a lot of names on it. For the month of December, I found a listing for Alice Dreiser. The address given was the one we'd checked in the Bronx.

"Here she is," I said. "Can you get her records?"

The vice-president looked at the name. "Certainly, just a moment." He buzzed his secretary again, told her what he wanted, and she brought the yellow file cards in a few moments later. The cards told me that Alice Dreiser had continued the diaper service through February. She'd been late on her February payment, and had cancelled service in March. She'd had the diapers delivered for the first week in March, but had not paid for them. She did not notify the company that she was moving. She had not returned the diapers they'd sent her that first week in

March. The company did not know where she was.

"If you find her," the vice-president told me, "I'd like to know. She owes us money."

"I'll keep that in mind." I said. I left him then.

The reports on the Dreisers were waiting for me back at the precinct. George had found a couple who claimed to being Carl's aunt and uncle. They knew he was married. They gave Alice's maiden name as Grant. They said she lived somewhere on Walton Avenue in the Bronx, or she had lived there when Carl first met her. No, they hadn't seen either Alice or Carl for months. Yes, they knew the Dreisers had had a daughter. They'd received an announcement card. They had never seen the baby.

Pat and I looked up the Grants on Walton Avenue, found a listing for Peter Grant, and went there together.

A bald man in his undershirt, his suspenders hanging over his trousers, opened the door.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Police officers," I said. "We'd like to ask a few questions."

"What about? Let me see your badges."

Pat and I flashed our buzzers and the bald man studied them.

"What kind of questions do you want to ask?"

"Are you Peter Grant?"

"Yeah, that's right. What's this all about?"

"May we come in?"

"Sure, come on in." We followed him into the apartment, and he motioned us to chairs in the small living room. "Now, what is it?" he asked.

"Your daughter is Alice Dreiser?"

"Yes," he said, his face unchanged.

"Do you know where she lives?"

"No."

"Come on, mister," Pat said. "You know where your daughter lives."

"I don't," Grant said, "and I don't give a damn, either."

"Why? What's wrong, mister?"

"Nothing. Nothing's wrong. It's none of your business, anyway."

"Her daughter had her neck broken," I said. "It's our business."

"I don't give a . . ." he started to say. He stopped then and looked straight ahead of him, his brows pulled together into a tight frown. "I'm sorry. I still don't know where she lives."

"Did you know she was married?"

"To that sailor. Yes, I knew that."

"And you knew she had a daughter?"

"Don't make me laugh," Grant said.

"What's funny, mister?" Pat said.

"Did I know she had a daughter? Why the hell do you think she married the sailor? Don't make me laugh!"

"When was your daughter married, Mr. Grant?"

"Last September." He saw the look on my face, and added, "Go ahead, you count it. The kid was born in November."

"Have you seen her since the marriage?"

"No."

"Have you ever seen the baby?"

"No."

"Do you have a picture of your daughter?"

"I think so. Is she in trouble? Do you think she did it?"

"We don't know who did it yet."

"Maybe she did," Grant said softly. "She just maybe did. I'll get you the picture."

He came back in a few minutes with the picture of a plain girl wearing a cap and gown. She had light eyes and straight hair, and her face was intently serious.

"She favors her mother," Grant said. "God rest her soul."

"Your wife is dead?"

"Yes. That picture was taken when Alice graduated from high school."

"May we have it?"

He hesitated and said, "It's the only one I've got. She . . . she didn't take many pictures. She wasn't a very . . . pretty girl."

"We'll return it."

"All right," he said. His eyes were troubled. "She . . . if she's in trouble, you'll let me know, won't you?"

"We'll let you know."

"A girl . . . makes mistakes sometimes." He stood up abruptly. "Let me know."

We had copies of the photo made, and then we staked out every church in the neighborhood in which the baby was found. Pat and I covered the Church of the Holy Mother, because we figured the woman was most likely to come back there.

We didn't talk much. There is something about a church of any denomination that makes a man think rather than talk. Pat and I knocked off at about seven every night, and the night boys took over then. We were back on the job at seven in the morning.

It was a week before she came in.

She stopped at the font in the rear of the church, dipped her hand in the holy water, and crossed herself. Then she walked to the altar, stopping before a statue of the Virgin Mary, lit a candle, and kneeled down before it.

"That's her," I said.

"Let's go," Pat answered.

"Not here. Outside."

Pat's eyes locked with mine for an instant. "Sure," he said.

She kneeled before the statue for a long time, and then got to her feet slowly, drying her eyes. She walked up the aisle, stopped at the font, crossed herself, and then walked outside.

We followed her out, catching up with her at the corner. I walked over on one side of her, and Pat on the other.

"Mrs. Dreiser?" I asked.

She stopped walking. "Yes?"

I showed my buzzer. "Police officers," I said. "We'd like to ask some questions."

She stared at my face for a long time. She drew a trembling breath then, and said, "I killed her. I . . . Carl was dead, you see. I . . . I guess that was it. It wasn't right . . . his getting killed, I mean. And she was crying."

"Want to tell it downtown, ma'am?" I asked.

She nodded blankly. "Yes, that was it. She just cried all the time, not knowing that I was crying inside. You don't know how I cried inside. Carl . . . he was all I had. I . . . I couldn't stand it any more. I told her to shut up and when she didn't I . . . I . . ."

"Come on along, ma'am," I said.

"I brought her to the church." She nodded, remembering it all now. "She was innocent, you know. So I brought her to the church. Did you find her there?"

"Yes, ma'am," I said. "That's where we found her."

She seemed pleased. A small smile covered her mouth and she said, "I'm so glad you found her."

She told the story again to the lieutenant. Pat and I checked out, and on the way to the subway, I asked him, "Do you still want to pull the switch, Pat?"

He didn't answer.

THAT BLESSED FOG

A Paris newspaper has been wondering aloud why the best detective stories are English. It seems Dr. Adenauer put the question to General de Gaulle recently, but got no precise answer. Here, so they say, are the reasons . . .

The English live, nine months out of twelve, in a fog that's so thick that they can't recognize each other three feet away. They've therefore developed abnormal powers of investigation.

The English, as everybody knows, make it a point of honour never to show their feelings and to always keep a "wooden" expression (so says this newspaper). The fundamental law of detective stories, that the murderer's identity must not be revealed until the last page, is clearly in their favor.

Only an English author can keep a secret to himself for 250 pages. A Frenchman would betray it at once, and a Slav or German take it with him to the grave.

Last, but by no means least, good police work is a question of tenacity —in other words, an English matter.

riddle of the tired bullet

by . . . Stuart Palmer

He'd been called the man of the week most likely to decorate a marble slab. And, in time, that's what he did.

"OOPS, EXCUSE ME!" Like a ruffled Buff Orpington, Miss Hildegarde Withers backed hastily out of the inspector's private office, where she had just surprised him in the embrace of a pretty red-head.

The spinster schoolma'am was deeply engrossed in a study of some old "Wanted for Murder" posters on the wall when Oscar Piper finally emerged to usher his fair visitor toward the corridor. She was thanking him effusively in a weak, brave voice. "And I'll take your advice, inspector."

When the tap of her heels had died away, the inspector came back toward Miss Withers, mopping his brow sheepishly. "Women!" he sighed.

Her sniff was pointed. "And at your age, too."

"And why not?" His Irish flared up. "You're jealous, maybe?"

"For some years," the schoolteacher told him gently, "my interest in you has been purely academic. I barely noticed the woman, except to see that she has suspiciously red-brown hair and that

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Hildegarde Withers, Inspector Piper's very private cross, is said to have been born in Dubuque in the 1890's. She acted as technical advisor on Paradox Pictures' LIFE OF LIZZIE BORDEN *(released as* PASSION'S PAWN*) in 1940. Her hobbies are criminology, tropical fish, semantics, dianetics.*

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she was wearing a last-year's suit made over at home. Not exactly young, but still pretty if you like the type." Miss Withers paused for breath, and then noticed that the inspector had turned back into his inner office. She rushed after him so fast that her hat, which resembled a bon-voyage basket a day after sailing, slid rakishly over one eye. "Wait, Oscar! Is it a new murder case?"

Oscar Piper poked painstakingly through his ashtray for a cigar butt recent enough to bear relighting. "Not yet it isn't," he admitted. "But the little lady was crying because she thinks she's going to be a widow."

"Something she dreamed, no doubt. Or is it astrology?"

"More to it than that. I had to agree with her that Ernest Hawkins is The Man of the Week Most Likely to Decorate a Marble Slab. Don't you recognize the name? Well, you'll be hearing more about him. Hawkins was secretary to old Amos Bigelow, ex-Senator Bigelow, of the Bigelow Buddy Fund Committee."

"But of course. They set out to raise money to send packages to the men in the armed forces, during the last year of the war. I was even asked to help them solicit, but the Gray Ladies work took up my spare time."

"Just as well. The Committee never got around to announcing how many packages ever got to the boys in uniform. The grand jury started to investigate them last week, and Hawkins blew the lid off when he promised to testify, under a promise of personal immunity."

"A tattle-tale, eh?"

"None of your brats down at P.S. 38 are in his class, though. He did the stool-pigeon act up brown, dragging in a lot of supposedly important citizens. He also admitted that fifteen or twenty thousand dollars of the money stuck to his own fingers, but he claims he dribbled it away in the night clubs and gambling."

"Fast women and slow horses, no doubt?"

"Yeh. He even named the bookie who took his bets, so now a tough Broadway character known as Track-odds Louie is out of business and under indictment. Which makes a sizable group of people who would like to cut Mr. Hawkins's throat."

"Oscar, something must be done at once!" Miss Withers nodded. "Think of his poor little wife."

"You think of her. Rena ought to be able to take care of herself —she used to be a tap dancer around the Fifty-second Street spots before she married Hawkins and settled down. I told her that she ought to go home and look up a good private detective agency in the phone book if she wanted protection—the homicide bureau is only interested in murders after they've happened."

Miss Withers stood up suddenly. "But Oscar, you're like a doctor who doesn't try to cure his patient because he's so interested in how the autopsy comes out!"

"Now, my dear Hildegarde—"

"I'm not your dear anything. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll break our date for dinner and the movies tonight. I prefer the company of my tank full of tropical fish—they're so much warmer-blooded!" And she flounced out of the office.

In spite of what she had said, Miss Withers had no time for her aquarium and its miniature jeweled fish that evening. She dined very sketchily on what she would have called "cold nothings" out of the refrigerator, and then went out to sit through most of a double feature. But somehow between her and the screen drama there kept popping up the figure of little Rena Hawkins, who knew that her husband was going to be killed. "It's as bad as King Charles' head," Miss Withers murmured. The woman beside her turned blankly. "*David Copperfield,* by Dickens," the schoolteacher explained, and then fled in the midst of annoyed hisses.

It was after ten o'clock, and she knew that she ought to go home and mind her own business. But somehow she was impelled to hurry through the drizzling rain to the nearest telephone booth, and then down into the bowels of the subway.

The house, when she finally located it on the wrong street in the wrong part of Queens, was a narrow three-story brick, stuck between a chain grocery and a used-car lot. It was dark and quiet, so quiet that the ringing of the doorbell under her thumb made the schoolteacher jump. But nobody answered, in spite of her repeated ringing.

Miss Withers went down the steps, hesitated a moment, and then picked her way back toward the alley, past the rusting heaps of unsold and unsalable automobiles. From the rear the residence of the Hawkins family was even less attractive than from the front, and she paused to thank her lucky stars that she had never been inveigled, in her early days, into matrimony and a life amid these drab surroundings.

There was, however, one sign of life here—from a third-floor window a lace curtain fluttered in the breeze and a soft light was shining. Someone must be at home, after all. Well, she had come miles and miles to bring aid and friendly counsel to a fellow human being in desperate straits, and she was determined to make delivery.

She turned in through the creaking back gate, past the looming bulk of ashcans, garbage containers, abandoned summer furniture and sagging clotheslines. The rain splattered on rusting tin and there were other sounds, like soft scur-

rying feet, which she tried not to hear. Hurrying a little, Miss Withers went up the steps and knocked. There was no answer, nor had she expected any. Neither had she expected the door to swing silently inward.

In a way it was an invitation, like the bottle in *Alice* with the label on it that said "Drink Me." So she entered on tiptoe, and then jumped as the door closed quickly behind her. The beam of a flashlight caught and held her impaled. "Hel-lo!" cried a man's high nervous tenor. Then the kitchen light was turned on, and she blinked at a beefy, curly-haired man in his shirt-sleeves and stocking feet, an athlete just beginning to run to fat. There was the strap of a shoulder holster across his chest, and in his fist a businesslike revolver. He looked jittery, competent, and puzzled.

Miss Withers heard her voice, breathlessly explaining that she had only come with the best of intentions and that if he would only dial headquarters instead of shooting, why somebody would vouch for her, and if he himself was Mr. Hawkins then—

The man with the gun relaxed just a little. "Mr. Hawkins is asleep upstairs," he said, in a tone which plainly indicated that all other respectable citizens should be likewise. "And so is his missus. My name is Johnny Brannigan, from the Onyx Agency on Fourteenth Street."

"A private eye!" she cried impulsively.

"A *what*?" Brannigan stared at his prisoner with growing distaste. "Lady, you got a bad case of too many movie thrillers. I'm just an ex-cop that got out of the marines a couple months ago and come back to help start up a new private agency. My job is to see nothing happens to Ernest Hawkins."

"I'm sure you are competent, but—" Miss Withers shook her head. "I learned about the situation quite by accident and got so worried that I just couldn't stay away. But nobody answered the door—"

He sighed. "Lady, would you answer a doorbell if you were in my shoes?" He caught her glance, and flushed slightly. "Anyway, I heard you out front. I heard you coming around to the back, so I left the door open and got ready—"

"So I see. And now that I'm here, could I have a word with Mr. Hawkins?"

"They both turned in for the night, lady. It's almost eleven o'clock, and I got orders not to bother them. They're paying me fifteen bucks a day and expenses to carry out orders."

"Of course. But—"

"Look," said Brannigan, with sarcastic patience. "Let's settle it this way. You leave me do my job, and you get back on your broomstick and fly away home,

huh?" He held the door invitingly open.

She had no choice but to flounce out into the night and the rain, angry as a boil. But the anger was mostly at herself, for getting into a ridiculous situation. "Men!" she muttered, as she picked her way toward the alley. Then all of a sudden the night exploded, and she was paralyzed by a blinding light and a racking roar of sound, which turned out to be nothing more than a suburban train swinging around the curve of the railway embankment, which bordered the alley on the far side, a dike of dirt and cinders as high as the telephone poles.

"My nerves!" protested Miss Withers. Then she stopped, and looked up at the lighted window. It was odd that a frightened man would lie in a room with an open window and a fluttering curtain. The curtain must be soaked with rain, too. The school-teacher took a deep breath and then began to pick her way up the steep side of the embankment, at considerable damage to her dignity, her shoes, and her gloves. But she finally made it, and then turned to look directly into the lighted window. She stood still for a long moment, and then started headlong down. . . .

Across the street from headquarters stands the Criminal Courts Building, one wing of which is devoted to the activities of the district attorney. In a reception room, furnished with uncomfortable modern chairs and decorated with photographs of municipal projects, six people were waiting—six nervous, unhappy persons guarded by an impersonal policeman.

Though the members of the group did not know it, they were at the moment being carefully studied through a one-way mirror set in the wall of Assistant D. A. Tom Minor's office. Minor himself was uneasier than any of them. "I still think we've overplayed our hand," he was saying. "These people are big shots, and they can make a lot of trouble."

"I'm used to trouble," Inspector Piper. "Who is which?"

"The old man with the jowls and the flowing hair is ex-Senator Bigelow, professional do-gooder. The hag in mink and pearls is the actress, Maylah Raymond, who used to have Diamond Jim Brady drink orange juice out of her slipper back when she was the toast of Broadway. The fat man in tweeds is General Hector Fleming, National Guard, formerly a famous armchair hero. The tall guy with the lovely gray toupee is Waldemar Hull, world-traveler, author, and lecturer at women's clubs. Facing him is Matthew Gruber, used to be legal counsel for the Watch and Ward Society up in Boston. They say he has the world's finest collection of pornography. That's the entire Bigelow Committee. . . ."

"What about the headwaiter with the big cigar, sitting all by himself?"

"Louis Margolis, the bookmaker. They say he has twenty dinner jackets."

"He may trade 'em for prison gray," Piper said. "Well, Tom, which is your candidate? Who looks like a potential murderer?"

Minor hesitated. "Well, now, inspector . . . this was your idea, not ours."

"Okay." Piper looked at his watch. "Five of eleven. Not bad work, considering the order to pick 'em up didn't go out until ten. Come on, let's give 'em the business."

A moment later they faced the group and Tom Minor cleared his throat apologetically. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, "you have been asked to come down here—"

"Asked!" shrieked Maylah Raymond. "I was dragged!"

Minor held up his hand. "—to come down here in connection with certain threats said to have been made against the life of one Ernest Hawkins." Behind him the door opened and a uniformed man came in to hand a teletype to Piper, but the assistant D.A. did not notice it. "You will be allowed to return home very shortly, as soon as you have put up a peace bond. But first I want to introduce you to a gentleman who has a few words to say. Inspector Oscar Piper, of homicide. . . ."

Minor paused, and waved his hand. He felt a crumpled sheet of paper shoved into his sweating fingers, and heard the door slam. Then he too read the message, and gulped. "The—the inspector asks me to apologize for him," he continued automatically. "He's just been called to take over the investigation into the murder of Ernest Hawkins. *Hawkins!*" he repeated, staring blankly at the six people who had every reason in the world to want that name on a tombstone. And they all stared back at him. Somebody in the room—was it Margolis the bookmaker?—let go a long, heartfelt sigh.

By the time the inspector reached the Hawkins house, the complex machinery of homicide investigation was already whirring. The place was blazing with lights, and everywhere detectives, uniformed officers, ballistics, fingerprint and cameramen scurried like ants in a disturbed ant-hill. It was a picture to bring satisfaction to the heart of any homicide squad skipper, with only one jarring note—the gaunt and unhappy figure which rose to greet him on the front porch.

"Oscar!" cried Miss Hildegarde Withers. "They won't even let me inside, and I'm the one who discovered the body!"

He blinked at her. "But how—"

"I just happened to be climb-

ing the railroad embankment across the alley from the rear of the house, so I could take a peek into the third-floor bedroom window. I looked in and saw a man lying in bed, under a reading-lamp. Only he wasn't reading at all—his face was covered with blood. Quite dead, I could see that. So I turned in the alarm."

She followed him inside, still talking about her adventures of the evening. "Wait here, will you?" he said finally, and left her. When he returned his face was very grave.

"The body—?" she began hopefully.

"Dr. Gavin, the assistant medical examiner, is upstairs now," Piper said. "If he needs your help he'll send for you."

"But Oscar—"

"This case has been a headache from the very beginning," he snapped. "Come with me." And Miss Withers found herself hustled unceremoniously into the living room, where Mr. Brannigan, the private detective, was sweating copiously under the stern gaze of a headquarters sergeant. On the couch lay Rena Hawkins, her reddish hair disheveled and her eyes looking like two burnt holes in a blanket. She wore a man's woolen bathrobe.

"Oh, it's you," the woman cried, when she saw the inspector. Her voice was thin and brittle. "Didn't I tell you so? Didn't I beg you to do something? You and your advice to go look up a good private detective—as if this clumsy ox was any protection—" She gave the private detective a look that could have curled his hair.

"Hold it," Piper said. "Brannigan, according to your story somebody tried to sneak into the house last night just before eleven o'clock?"

"Yes, sir." Brannigan pointed accusingly toward Miss Withers. "It was *her*. I figured she was just a harmless nut, so I let her go."

"Why, of all things, when I was merely trying—" Miss Withers was gasping. "How *dare* you say that?"

"Okay, okay, I'll ask the questions," Piper said wearily. "Brannigan, after you got rid of the lady, what next?"

"I began to worry about Mr. Hawkins. I tiptoed upstairs to see if he was all right, and there was a streak of light under his door. Only he didn't answer my knock. I went and tried to wake up his wife, only she was dead to the world. I got really worried then, because he was locked in and I didn't have a key. So I kicked in a panel of the door, and there he was, stiffer'n a mackerel. It looked like a .45 caliber hole in his head."

"The medical examiner bears that out. What did you do next?"

"Me? I went downstairs to let the police radio car boys in, be-

fore they smashed the door down. Somebody already called 'em. . ."

"When was the last time you saw Hawkins alive?"

Brannigan frowned. "Shortly after I got on the job, about nine-thirty, when he went up to bed."

"And you stick to your story that you didn't hear the shot?"

"Not even a loud noise. Nothing."

"How do you account for a man in this house being killed with a large-caliber pistol and you not hearing it?"

The man shook his head miserably. "Honest, I don't."

Piper's face wore an expression of deep disgust, but he turned quickly to Rena Hawkins. "Well, are you deaf too?"

She was dry-eyed, but Miss Withers thought the woman not far from hysteria. "I didn't hear a thing," Rena said dully. "But there were two doors between me and Ernest. I was in our regular bedroom on the second floor front. You see, I just had to get some sleep, and Ernest has been tossing around so much at night, I made him go upstairs to the spare bedroom where he could lock himself in."

Miss Withers whispered in the inspector's ear. "Oscar, I have an idea! Suppose we make a test—I'll lie down in Mrs. Hawkins' bedroom and you close the doors and then fire off a pistol in the murder room, to see if I can hear it?"

He was unimpressed. "No good, unless we had the same gun."

"Oh, yes!" said the schoolteacher happily. *"The same gun!* I wonder if it could have been the weapon Mr. Brannigan was waving in my face earlier this evening? He wore one of those gangster strap things around his shoulder—"

The private operative flushed beet-red. "Ask Sergeant Mertz about that," he said sulkily.

"Sure," said the sergeant. "We took the roscoe off him when we got here. Ballistics has it now, but I can tell you beforehand that it's a new .38, never fired, and too small for the hole in Hawkins' head."

Rena Hawkins said, through dry lips, "There wouldn't be any use in the test of whether I heard the shot or not, unless Miss Whatshername here took a couple of stiff slugs of whisky and a double dose of veronal, like I did when I went to bed last night."

"She was still groggy when we got here," Mertz put in. "The radio car boys say they had to pour water on her to wake her up."

"Okay for now," the inspector said. Rena Hawkins subsided upon the couch, biting her handkerchief, but Brannigan stood up hopefully. At the look in Piper's face he sat down again. Miss Withers felt herself impelled out into the hall.

"Oscar," she cried hopefully, "I have another idea! Couldn't somebody have sneaked into the house and picked the lock of Hawkins' bedroom, or else climbed up to the window on a ladder and then shot him using a silencer?"

Piper shook his head wearily. "A silencer is no damn good except on a rifle, though the general public doesn't know it. Moreover, there's a Yale-type lock on the bedroom door, practically unpickable. No ladder marks in the soft mud of the yard, either."

She shrugged, "Well, I was only trying—"

"Trying to make a mystery out of what must be a simple inside job. That Brannigan fellow is lying like a rug. Only—"

"Only why should an ex-policeman, with so much experience along these lines, and with intelligence enough to start his own detective agency when he left the service, tell an obvious lie?"

It was close enough to nettle the inspector. "Maybe—"

"And with all those people on the Bigelow Committee wanting Hawkins dead—"

Wearily the inspector gave a résumé of his evening. "I was only trying to follow your suggestions," he said. "Preventive detection, and all that. But we can cancel out the lot of them. Dr. Gavin says that Hawkins died shortly after ten. None of the suspects could have been out here murdering Hawkins and got home in time to be picked up when the order went out. So forget it."

"But Oscar," she cried, "there must be some mistake—"

"You're making it," he snapped. "Nobody asked you to come out here and solve the mystery of the locked room. You're off base. Suppose you just sit here a while and let men do men's work, huh?" He pointed to the bench, and hurried upstairs again.

When the inspector finally came back downstairs, he found her studying the pile of tattered phone books on the bench. His mood, she sensed, had mysteriously improved. "Trying to look up the answers in the back of the book, Hildegarde?"

"Not quite. But I have an idea. Only none of the suspects seems to live out here on Long Island. Of course, these phone books are a year old. *They're titled Summer-Fall 1946, and people might have moved.*"

"So what?"

"The murder was committed between nine-forty, when he went to bed, and a little after eleven, when I first saw the body. The medical examiner says shortly after ten. Suppose the killer lived only a few minutes from here—he could have still got home in time to be picked up. Maybe he was laughing up his sleeve, or quaking in his boots, down in the district attorney's office?"

"Relax," Piper told her. "They all live in Manhattan. But we're way ahead of you. Now that the case is all over but the shouting, come on up and I'll show you how it was done."

"And by whom?"

"That part'll be easy. You see, Dr. Gavin says Hawkins was killed by a .45 bullet that only went an inch or so into his brain."

" 'Not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but 'tis enough,' " she quoted. "Shakespeare."

"You don't get the point. The shot couldn't possibly have been fired in the bedroom at all, or it would have gone through him and buried itself in the wall. A gun that size can put a bullet through four inches of hardwood. The slug that killed him was a spent bullet, just about at the limit of its effective range." They came to the third floor and along the hall, through the door with the smashed panel and into the room where at the moment Ernest Hawkins was posing for his last photographs. Miss Withers took another look at the lifeless, sagging body, one hand still loosely holding a copy of *Turf and Paddock Magazine,* sniffed at the empty brandy bottle on the bedside table, and then turned quickly away. It was a relief to rejoin the inspector, who was pointing out the window.

"Nobody heard the shot," he said, "because it wasn't fired inside the house. What noise there was was drowned out by the roar of a passing train. You see that the embankment is almost at this level? The eastbound trains go by like a bat out of hell, but the ones headed toward Manhattan have to slow down along here for a signal block ahead. The killer must have been standing on the rear platform, where he'd be alone. Luck was with him—it was a good two hundred and fifty feet, but you yourself know how the open window and the bed-lamp made a target out of the victim. And if the shot had only winged Hawkins, it would still have scared him out of testifying at the trial."

Miss Withers admitted all that. She had more to say, but the inspector was suddenly called downstairs to the phone. A few moments later he came back up the stairs, his face wreathed in a wide grin. At the landing he stopped, frowned, and then turned back and went into Rena Hawkins' bedroom, where he surprised Miss Withers poking around among the boxes and bottles on the vanity table.

"Look, Oscar," she cried, displaying a sphinx-marked box. "She does use henna!"

"Okay. So you were right about one thing, anyway! But you have no business to go snooping around. What do you suppose you could find that we didn't notice

when we officially searched the place, huh?"

She hesitated. "Sometimes I think that the police only see the things that are there, instead of noticing the things that should be and aren't." She gestured, vaguely.

The inspector looked at the bottles and jars on the vanity. "Looks like ordinary dime store stuff to me."

But Miss Withers had turned her attention to the heavy, steel money-box on the bureau. "Oh, if that's it, I've got the key," Piper said. "Wanta peek?" He opened it, dumping out a sheaf of old pari-mutuel tickets. "Proving that Hawkins made some very unlucky fifty-dollar bets when he went to the track. Probably saved them so he could prove his losses against his gains, for the income-tax people."

With feminine contrariness, Miss Withers had lost interest in the strongbox and was peering into the closet. "Bedroom slippers, three pairs of oxfords, a pair of opera pumps run down at the heel, and one pair of overshoes," she enumerated.

"No Seven-League boots?"

"I was thinking," Miss Withers announced cryptically, "of glass slippers—the kind that Cinderella wore to the ball."

The inspector said he had had enough of fairy stories and urged her toward the door. "I've got work to do," he said.

"You have your work cut out for you, if you're going to try to prove that theory about the shot being fired from a train," she insisted. "I've been thinking it over and—"

"And the shot that killed Hawkins was fired from a westbound train which passed this point at exactly ten-five," he told her.

"Just got a report that a maintenance man in the Pennsy yards stumbled on a .45 automatic, recently fired, one shell gone, on the rear platform of a suburban train that ended its last run at ten-fourteen. I'll bet you all the tea in China that the slug in Hawkins' head fits that gun."

Miss Withers was opposed to betting. "I dont' see why you're so elated, Oscar. That puts us right back where we started. Because any of the suspects could have been aboard that train, perhaps as a round-trip passenger, and still have had time enough to get home to his residence anywhere in midtown Manhattan and be picked up by your detectives at ten-forty or before. It re-opens the case—"

"Sure. But now we've got some things to work on. We've washed out the possibility of an inside job. The shot was fired from outside, and neither Brannigan nor Rena were outside last night, because I personally looked for traces of mud on their shoes. We've got the murder gun and

we'll start checking it. We know the killer was a good shot, and that he was on that train. We'll have men check with every ticket-seller, every conductor, every taxi driver. . . ."

"It sounds like a lot of trouble," she said. "But I've noticed that nothing is too much trouble for the department—*after* a murder is committed. Except to sit down quietly and think about things."

He grinned. "You mean the things that aren't there?"

"Perhaps I do. Oscar, are you still holding the members of the Bigelow Committee?"

"Only for the nitrate test. And the killer was probably smart enough to hold the gun with a glove and then toss it overboard immediately after the shot. First thing in the morning we'll comb the right of way, naturally."

"Naturally." Miss Withers started down the stair. "Oscar, will you excuse me? I hate to remind you, but it'll be daylight soon."

"Huh? So it will. Come on." They came down into the lower hall of the Hawkins house. Miss Withers peered into the living room, where Rena Hawkins was alone, sleeping sprawled out on the couch and snoring faintly.

Miss Withers gently drew the dressing gown over the woman's knees and turned out the glaring light. "I suppose you have already released Mr. Brannigan?"

"Sure. He was glad to get out of it, even if she wouldn't give him his pay for the job. Last thing he said was that he thought he'd try to get back on the force, and I'll help him." Piper turned. "Hey, Sam!" After a short wait Sergeant Mertz came toward them from the kitchen, wiping his mouth. "Sam, will you be a good guy and run Miss Withers home? She has to teach geography to a bunch of little hoodlums tomorrow."

"Sure!" the sergeant said. "Glad to."

"Thank you," said the schoolteacher. "But it's just that I want to get away from all this confusion to some place where it's quiet." And she stalked out of the door.

Promptly at nine o'clock next morning Miss Hildegarde Withers accepted the two red apples which were her day's offering, and then called to attention her third-grade class at P.S. 38. At nine-ten the last of her pupils disappeared down the hall, headed for an unexpected half-holiday. " 'All work and no play,' " she said to herself, and reached for her hat again.

But it was rising noon when she walked into the office of her old friend and sparring partner, to find the inspector taking aspirin and chasing it with black coffee out of a paper cup. "Oscar!" she cried. "I just dropped

in to congratulate you. Because it says in the afternoon papers that the police have the Hawkins case well in hand and an arrest is expected any moment!"

"Don't rub it in," he said bitterly. "As you very well know, that's the standard press handout when we are completely up a tree."

"Dear me! You mean to tell me that even with the entire Bigelow Committee as ready-made suspects, you haven't arrested anybody? Do they all have perfect alibis?"

Slowly Piper shook his head. "Worse than that. They don't have any alibis that you can check. They all had motive and opportunity—at least opportunity to be aboard that train, though the railroad employees don't seem to be able to identify anybody. We've more or less narrowed it down to General Fleming, Waldemar Hull, and Track-odds Louie, just because an army officer, an explorer, and a gambler should each have had some experience with firearms. But they all deny it. No luck tracing the pistol, either—it was listed as stolen eleven years ago."

"How sad," she murmured, "to have the wonderful, efficient, infallible detective machinery bog down."

"We found the glove, anyway!" he blurted out. "On the right of way, not fifty feet from the Hawkins house. Only—"

"Only it was probably cheap cotton, untraceable, and large enough to fit any suspect, man or woman?"

Piper nodded, his shoulders sagging. "I guess that was to be expected." Then he cocked his head, suspiciously. "All right, why are you needling me this way? What are you up to?"

"I? Why, nothing at all. I just gave my pupils a half-holiday this morning, so I could play hooky. I made several phone calls, too. One of them was to the Onyx Agency, after I first got the number from Information. Mr. Brannigan answered the phone, and I asked if he remembered me. He said he didn't think he ever could forget, but that he would try. Very bitter, he was. But he did brighten up when I asked him to help me solve the Hawkins case, and told him my theory. . . ."

"Wait a minute," put in the inspector testily. "Whose side are you on?"

"I am," she said, "interested only in getting at the truth, through any available door. That was why I made another phone call this morning—to Mr. Margolis, the bookmaker. Did it ever occur to anybody to ask just how much money the late Mr. Hawkins lost playing the races?"

"No, and I don't give a hoot."

"But you should. I did ask, and I found that Hawkins didn't lose—he won. Thousands and thousands of dollars. The devil takes

care of his own, they say. Anyway, his winnings must have constituted the money that was in the strongbox in the Hawkins bedroom, before the murderer took it and substituted old pari-mutuel tickets. There had to be something for you to find inside."

"So what?" Patience had never been the inspector's long suit. "Will you get to the point of all this, if there is any point?"

"By all means. I made still another phone call—to Rena Hawkins. I wanted to ask her who it was that suggested the Onyx Agency to her."

"She said she looked it up in the phone book—" Piper began.

"I know she said that. But the phone book was put out a year before the agency was opened. I wanted to ask Rena if maybe she hadn't known Brannigan when she was a dancer around the hotspots, and when he was a policeman assigned to the Times Square area. In fact, I did ask her, but she only hung up on me."

The inspector was rigid. "Brannigan!" he whispered.

"An inside job," Miss Withers agreed. "And you have no idea just how much of an inside job it was."

Piper wasn't listening. "Brannigan," he said again. "Somebody got to him, hired him to do the job. Why, that—"

"We really ought to make Mrs. Hawkins answer the question," Miss Withers suggested again. "Perhaps if we went out there—?"

"Never mind that. *Brannigan*—and you actually phoned him and tipped him off?" Without waiting for an answer the inspector pressed the switch of the interoffice communicator, roaring orders to pick up Thomas Brannigan on a charge of murder.

It was some time before Miss Withers could repeat her request for a trip out to Queens. "That can wait," Piper told her. "Lucky thing we've got a man stationed in the Hawkins house." He reached for the phone, and dialed a number.

"No answer?" Miss Withers nodded. "It doesn't surprise me at all." The inspector grabbed his hat and headed out of the office, but she kept close behind him. The departmental sedan, siren screaming, cut across the bridge and eastward into the depths of Queens County. During a lull Miss Withers said gently, "Oscar, if you shot somebody from the rear platform of a train what would you do with the gun? Would you put it down gently beside you, or would you hurl it as far as you could? Also, why couldn't the gun have been tossed onto the train, by someone standing on the embankment out in back?"

He didn't answer. Finally they drew up before the Hawkins house and for a while everything

was confusion. The door had to be forced and then they found the policeman on duty there. He had not left his post after all, but he lay on the kitchen floor cold as a Christmas goose, a lump on his head and a broken beer bottle beside him. Of red-haired Rena Hawkins there was no sign whatever.

The inspector was on the phone, directing the laying of a dragnet, the complicated operations of a manhunt that would extend all over the metropolitan area of New York. "And put all available men on the railroad stations, the bus depots . . ."

Miss Withers plucked at his sleeve, but he jerked away angrily. "You and your meddling," he growled.

"Shh," she whispered. "Watch your language. Little pitchers, you know—"

He suddenly realized that she had brought a veritable horde of small boys into the house with her, thirty or more round little faces staring at him, smiling through missing teeth, breathing heavily. . . .

"My class," she explained. "But Oscar, before you hang up, I suggest that you forget about the stations and the airports and look for a 1931 gray Maxwell coupé, probably headed south for Mexico."

He only stared at her.

"You see," she hastily went on, "while you were running around in circles in here I went out and had a chat with the nice man who runs the used-car lot next door. I had noticed that one car that was there last night was missing now, and it occurred to me that if somebody was in a hurry to hide some money last night, in a safe place *outside* the house—"

"Are you saying Rena stole the car?"

"Oh, no. The man said it was sold over the phone this morning, to a Mr. Smith. It's being delivered to him out in Jersey City right this minute — the buyer promised to pay cash and I wonder if perhaps he doesn't plan to pay it out of the money that was stuffed under the cushions or somewhere last night just after the murder was committed?"

The inspector was already giving quick orders over the telephone, orders that were eventually to result in the New Jersey state police swooping down on their motorcycles to pick up Brannigan and Rena Hawkins before they had even had their first flat tire. Which was a good thing, because there was no air in the spare tire—only eighteen thousand dollars, in a neat package.

"They're guilty, all right," the inspector was saying. "But we've no valid case against them. Because neither of them left the house last night, to fire the shot or to stash the money. I checked their shoes—"

"Feet," pointed out Miss Withers, "were made before shoes. I mean bare feet. And moreover, I keep trying to tell you—the shot wasn't fired from outside, either from the platform or the railroad embankment. It was fired *in the bedroom!*"

"And I keep trying to tell you," Piper shouted, "that it couldn't have happened that way, because the bullet would have gone right through Hawkins' head at close range!"

The thirty little boys still waited. Miss Withers pushed two of them forward. "Inspector, this is Sigismund and this is Walter—two of my best pupils. When I gave my class a half-holiday, I suggested that they might use their bright little eyes in searching the alley and the railroad tracks back of this house. Boys, please show the nice inspector what you found."

Walter nudged Sigismund, who gulped and then started to prospect in the recesses of his clothing. With some assistance the urchin finally produced a piece of oak two-by-four. "There, you see?" cried Miss Withers, in modest pride. "That will do, boys. The inspector will reward each of you with a dollar, and everybody else gets money for ice cream."

In a daze the inspector found himself paying off. The little boys disappeared, whooping like Comanches.

"This piece of wood," Miss Withers promised the inspector, "is worth every cent it cost you. Do you remember saying to me that the gun which killed Hawkins could shoot through a four-inch plank? Well, it immediately occurred to me that if there actually had been a plank held against the forehead of a sleeping man, and if the muzzle of the gun were pressed tight against the plank . . ." She gestured.

"Judas Priest in a whirlwind!" muttered the inspector. He rubbed his thumb against the powder-blackening on one surface of the two-by-four, and then poked a finger into the hole drilled clean through the wood.

"It was a spent bullet, Oscar, just as you said—*even though it had to travel only a few inches.*"

The inspector had to admit that she was right. He wrapped up the piece of wood in his handkerchief and put it into his pocket. "This will be Exhibit A in the case of the State of New York versus Thomas Brannigan and Rena Hawkins."

Miss Withers nodded. "Hell," she said, "hath no fury like a wife who finds that while she has been sitting home her husband has been gallivanting around the night clubs. Exhibit B should be a pair of new evening slippers."

"Huh?" Oscar Piper blinked. "What slippers?"

"The ones he never bought her," said Hildegarde Withers.

THE saint's RATINGS

Variety is the spice of life,

they say. Whoever "they" are, this is one time when they know what they are talking about. The word boredom was invented to describe the repetitious tottering about of the half-potted private eye with the thick skull and a metabolism that subsists solely on blondes, rare steaks and whiskey. We have seen enough of his unshaven features and bloodshot eyes—yet he is as hard to get rid of as athlete's foot. There arrive each month at least a dozen new chronicles of his dull adventures. Therefore we are doubly glad when variety sneaks into the paperbacks and we are given something novel to read. The first three books below are cases in point.

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ash can

THE REST MUST DIE, (Gold Medal, 35¢)

A brutal story of what happens to the people trapped in New York's subways after the atom bomb falls. The author, easily recognized behind a thin pen name, is an old hand at both mysteries and science fiction. This is a strong amalgam of both.

NEVER SMILE AT CHILDREN, by E. T. French (Pyramid, 35¢)

Realistic—and frightening—novel of a little girl who couldn't talk. Yet she was the only one who knew how her mother had died. When the doctor tries to bring her speech back, he finds more trouble than he had bargained for.

THE VANISHING VIXEN, by Roy B. Sparkia (Crest Books, 25¢)

This vixen is a rocket, not a girl. And the story of spies, sabotage, sex and big business revolves around the new missile. Without the rocket the plot would be a dud. It supplies the vital difference between bad and readable.

DRAGNET—THE CASE OF THE CRIME KING, by Richard Deming (Pocket Book, 25¢)

Good old Joe deadpans his way through another case. The TV formula isn't as heavy this time, but the story has no real excitement. If this is based on truth—it is obvious why people prefer fiction.

THE MISTRESS, by Carter Brown (Signet, 25¢)

Sure death. For the reader.

KITTEN WITH A WHIP, by Wade Miller (Gold Medal, 35¢)

There is a word for this . . . but it's unprintable.

I'M CANNON FOR HIRE, by Curt Cannon (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Don't call us, we'll call you.

the man who knew women

by . . . Robert Bloch

All at once he felt very cold. There was something about the way Bert looked at him that he didn't like.

BEFORE he left his motel room, Luis Manuel took a good look in the mirror. He wanted to make sure that Lou Manning was there.

His reflection reassured him. Lou Manning was very much present.

Actually, Luis Manuel was allergic to mirrors. He didn't like the sight of himself—a little, balding, swarthy man with a graying mustache and ill-fitting false teeth made by a prison dentist.

But Lou Manning was something to look at. He was at least two inches taller than Luis, thanks to the elevator shoes. The cheap choppers had long since been replaced by gleaming platework, and the bald forehead completely concealed with a curly brown hair-piece. A pair of scissors and a bit of dye transformed the straggly gray mustache into a black and virile symbol of masculinity.

Luis smiled and adjusted his silk tie. He admired his new tropical gabardine suit, his open-weave shirt, his over-size zircon ring. He didn't take pride in them for their own sake—it was

It seems a Robert Bloch fan asked, recently, what he, Bloch, was like. He is said to have replied, "I have the heart of a small boy. I keep it on my desk in a bottle." His publishers suggest this will give you some idea of what to expect from PSYCHO, *just published. (Simon and Schuster, $2.95).*

the effect they created. The effect of Lou Manning. He was proud of the way Lou Manning looked, and proud of what Lou Manning could do.

In the past month, Lou Manning had done a lot. He had written all those letters to the Romance Club and carefully scanned the replies. He had selected Bessie Carmody as a likely prospect and given her a real snow job. To such good effect that before the month was up, he was out of the snow of Boston and down here in the warmth of Daytona Beach.

And the past week had seen even greater progress. Once he found out that Bessie Carmody really *was* a childless widow with an $8,000 bank account, Lou Manning really went to work on her. The old bat (she was fifty-three, just a trifle older than Luis Manuel) was flattered at the attentions of dashing, debonair Lou. And she was tired of working as a clerk at one of the Boardwalk motels. The idea of marrying a wealthy promoter was irresistible.

Lou Manning shrugged at his image. He was a promoter, all right, but he wasn't wealthy—yet. That's why he was promoting; he could use that $8,000 in a hurry. He'd gambled his last few hundred dollars to come down here, invest in a new outfit, and pitch a little woo at fat, foolish Bessie Carmody.

Well, the gamble had paid off. Before the week was out the marriage would go through.

So Lou Manning had every reason to be proud of himself. He knew how to handle women. It was like being an actor, he often rationalized. That's what he really was; an actor who played the role of Lou Manning.

This was quite a rationalization, for most people would consider Lou Manning a bad actor, in the slang sense of the term. He didn't play his part for applause, and although he had several captive audiences in the past, they all seemed to have disappeared.

But there was no need to worry about that now. Lou Manning picked up the corsage and the box of candy. Another eight bucks shot—but what the hell, he was shooting for eight *thousand* bucks. It was a good investment. Bessie Carmody would be pleased with the corsage and her fat jowls would quiver over the candy.

And that's the way it worked out. When Lou left his shabby little motel and walked over to the lobby of the big $40-a-day establishment on the ocean side of the Boardwalk, Bessie was waiting for him. She did coo over the corsage and she did quiver over the candy, and it was all Lou could do to keep from laughing as he watched the plump, overdressed, middle-aged widow simpering girlishly and fluttering her eyelashes.

He planned, now, to take her out for dinner and a few drinks. That would cost him another twelve bucks or so, but it would be money spent for a purpose. He'd soften her up, make a date to get the marriage license tomorrow, and discuss where to spend their honeymoon. Lou had it all planned.

But there was one thing he hadn't planned on. When he kissed her on the forehead and said, "Well, shall we go now?" Bessie shook her head.

"Just a minute, dear," she told him. "I've got company. He'll be down right away."

"He?"

"Oh, here he comes now."

And sure enough, this character came walking down the stairs—this little thin, dried-up baldheaded guy with the rimless glasses and the pasty white complexion. He was wearing a light gray suit and a loud purple shirt —a real creep outfit. Lou Manning didn't like his looks and he didn't like his actions. He went right up to Bessie, smiled, and kissed her on the mouth. Lou wanted to clobber him.

Instead, he waited for the introduction.

It came. Bessie simpered and said, "Dear, I have a surprise for you. This is my brother, Bert Jackson."

This was a surprise, all right. She'd never mentioned a brother before. And what in hell was he doing here?

Lou didn't have to ask the question, because Bert Jackson was already supplying the answer.

"Take five," he said, holding out his hand. It was cold and small and soft, like a dead sardine. But he pumped Lou's arm up and down, and his voice was loud and hearty. "The kid wrote me about you last week," he said. "Told me you were going to make an honest woman out of her, so I didn't bother to bring my shotgun. So I figured I'd lay off for a week and take a run down here to get acquainted. After all, she's the only family I've got."

"You're not married, eh?" Lou asked.

"No, but I'm all for it. Marriage is a great institution—no family should be without it." Bert Jackson uttered a barking laugh and dug Lou in the ribs. "That's an old Cantor gag," he said.

Bessie smiled indulgently at her brother. "Bert used to be in vaudeville years ago," she explained. "He was one of the best—"

"What do you mean, *used* to be?" Bert demanded. "I'm still working the same routine, only now they call it television. Of course, mainly I play club dates these days. My agent keeps me booked solid, and it's sure a lot

better than the old five-a-day. Or even the two-a-day."

Bessie took her brother's arm. "I hope you didn't give up a good job just to run down here."

"You know I always head south at least once a year for a change and a rest," Bert Jackson said. He grinned at Lou. "The bellboys get the change and the bookies get the rest."

Lou kept the forced smile in place. This fink and his corny chatter—was he going to be hanging around now?

Apparently so, because Bessie was saying, "I thought Bert could join us tonight for dinner."

There was nothing else to do but go along with the gag; go along with the gagster. And that's the way it worked out. Lou had planned to eat at a Chinese place with a bar attached, and he took them there. But the rest of his plans—including lining up the trip to the license bureau tomorrow—went by the board. He had no chance to talk to Bessie alone. In fact, he scarcely got a chance to talk at all. Bert Jackson took over in that department.

A few drinks put him in a reminiscent mood. Bessie herself had never been in what Bert Jackson insisted on calling "show biz" but apparently she'd followed her brother's career, because he addressed himself mainly to her.

"Remember when I got my first big break on Orpheum time? Those were the days. Lou Holtz was doing a single in blackface; they were still imitating Tinney, you know. Only a few comics who didn't work that old heckling routine with the orchestra leader. Old Herb Williams used to sock the leader over the head with a baseball bat. He had another great sight-gag—got himself a gimmick axe and hit the leader with that instead. But it backfired on him—looked too gruesome, see? So he had to cut it out."

Lou listened and wondered how it would be if he could hit Bert Jackson over the head with an axe. He wouldn't bother to use a fake one, either, if he had the chance. But all he could do was sit and smile.

"Of course, for my money, the real comics were the ones who didn't force the laugh. Bert Wheeler and the apple-eating bit, and old Raymond Hitchcock in his baggy street-clothes with the hair hanging down in his eyes. I'll bet Will Rogers copied that getup from him. I was on a bill with Will once in Scranton, when he was still doing the rope act. He tried to teach it to Fred Stone. There was an all-round trouper for you, that Stone! Reminds me of Joe Cook, another guy who could do anything. Of course they all got into musical comedy or legit in the twenties. I was only a kid, and by the time things started breaking for me, vaude was on its last legs. Oh, we had good

people working—Fred Sanborn and his xylophone, Fanny and Kitty Watson, old Johnny Burke and his rookie monologue, Senator Murphy, and even some of the flash acts like Kellerman and the Gus Edwards gang. But you could see the end coming—"

Lou wished he could see the end coming. But he had to sit there and be polite, nodding at the mention of names that meant nothing to him. What did he know about Cross and Dunn or Savoy and Brennan or Jones and Hare? And what did he care about Lowe, Hite and Stanley or Willie West and McGinty or Herman Timberg, Jr.?

The more he drank, the more the little man talked. And Lou found himself drinking just in order to keep going. There came a time when he was grateful for that. Because somehow the conversation had shifted from vaudeville and gotten around to Lou Manning—what he'd done in the old days, where he'd come from, what he did for a living now.

Only it wasn't a case of "somehow"; Lou suddenly realized that Bert Jackson had deliberately led up to this. Quite a clever little operator, this oldtime vaudevillian! On the other hand, since when was a two-a-day ham any match for a professional actor? And Lou Manning considered himself to be just that. Oh, he didn't give his performances on the legitimate stage—but in his own field, the illegitimate theatre, he was supreme. He knew how to build up a characterization, all right.

And he built one now. He parried all the questions Bert Jackson could throw at him. The drinks gave him confidence, and so did Bessie's plump hand resting on his wrist as he talked. He smiled at the little baldheaded brother and poured it on. He talked about his mining interests out west, and about his poor dead wife Florence, and about his hopes for the future.

The orphan from the Orpheum circuit ate it all up. How did he know that the closest Lou ever came to mining out west was a stretch on the rockpile, or that he never had a wife named Florence? There'd been one named Mae, and one named Ellen, and one named Dorinda, but never a Florence. And as to those hopes for the future—Lou carefully omitted all mention of the eight grand.

It worked all right. Walking home after leaving brother and sister at their motel, Lou congratulated himself. Until he remembered that he hadn't managed to talk to Bessie in private or discuss their plans. Bert Jackson had seen to that. All he had was a vague promise to see her tomorrow, after work.

Lou figured he had to do something about it, so he called her the next morning and ar-

ranged for a private get-together. To his surprise, Bessie offered no objections. In fact, she didn't even mention her brother.

That came later. It came when they met in the evening and sat on a bench overlooking the Boardwalk, watching the waves roll in. Lou had his arm around her and he was talking about the marriage-license when he felt her stiffen. He knew enough about women to realize that something was wrong.

"What's the matter, honey?" he asked. "You aren't getting cold feet, are you?"

"No." Bessie stared out at the water. "It's just that—well, maybe we're rushing things a little."

"How can you say that? Only two days ago you were all set. You told me yourself how tired you were of living alone."

"I know. But I didn't have any choice, then."

"Don't tell me somebody else has come along to beat my time?"

Bessie giggled, but her heart wasn't in it. "Oh, nothing like that! It's just Bert."

"Bert? What about Bert?"

"Well—" She shifted uneasily, then faced him. "Bert says I should come and live with him. Says he's thinking of settling down in a place of his own, doing a little local TV work and maybe just playing the Borscht Circuit in summer. And he'd like me to keep house for him. It'll be just like being married, only—" Bessie hesitated, but Lou picked it right up.

"Only what?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

"Nothing, my eye!" Lou put his hand on her arm. "Bert doesn't want you to marry me, does he? I could tell that last night. He's got something against me."

"Oh, no!" Bessie's denial was emphatic. "He was very honest about that, dear—he hasn't got a single, solitary thing against you. It's just that he feels we haven't known each other long enough. He has an idea you're sort of rushing me into this."

Lou laughed. "*I'm* rushing you into this? What about him? He hasn't seen you for years and all at once he pops up down here and within twenty-four hours he's trying to promote you for a free housekeeper." Lou hesitated, then decided to take the risk. "And I'll bet he even suggested you go in with him and help pay for the house."

From the expression on Bessie's fat face, Lou knew his hunch had paid off. He bored in. "Sure," he said. "It's the Big Brother act, isn't it? He wants to protect you. Hah!" Suddenly he made his voice soften. "Don't get me wrong, honey. I'm not trying to knock the guy. But the way he struck me, from seeing him last night, is that Bert's not the type who'll ever really settle down. He never got married, did

he? He's used to moving around, spending his money as fast as he earns it, and I'll bet he likes to take a little drink every now and then, too. I know these actors, honey—they're always out for a good time and a lot of laughs. But Bert isn't getting any younger, is he? And all of a sudden he realizes maybe it would be nice to have a home of his own and somebody to look after him."

"What's so wrong about that?" Bessie demanded.

"Nothing. For Bert, it's perfect. But he's thinking about himself. And I'm thinking about you."

Lou's voice got even softer as he slid his arm around Bessie's waist. "You want your own home, don't you?" he said. "The kind of a home you used to have, when Clarence was still alive. Remember, how you told me about it? How nice it was to know that there was somebody to be with you, every night, somebody to love? You're still a young woman, Bessie. You don't need a brother—you need a husband."

It made Lou sick to have to talk this way; almost as sick as it did to put his arm around the old bag. But this was the kind of pitch that paid off. He kept on for quite a while, until Bessie started sobbing.

"You—you *do* love me, don't you, darling?" she wheezed. "I mean, it isn't just an act of some kind?"

"How can you even imagine such a thing?" Lou whispered. "No—don't answer me. You couldn't imagine it, I know. It would take Bert to think of an idea like that. Tell me the truth, now, Bessie. What other ideas has he been putting in your head?"

Bessie sobbed a little louder. She could scarcely get the words out. "He said he thought you were a —phoney. And he said—" The words came in a rushing gurgle. "He said that you wore a *toupee.*"

It sounded so damned funny Lou could scarcely choke back the laugh. On the other hand, it was damned serious, too. Women had the screwiest ideas sometimes. Lou debated his reply for a moment.

"All right," he said. "Your brother is a pretty shrewd observer. I *do* wear a *toupee.* But that's nothing to be ashamed of, is it? Is it?"

"N-no."

"But that's as far as it goes, dear. I'm not going to try and defend myself against Bert's suspicions. I don't think I have to. My actions speak for themselves. Have I ever done anything to make you think I'm a phoney, as he puts it? Have I ever stepped out of line in any way? Answer me, Bessie—have I?"

"Of course not."

"All I've ever done is make you an honorable offer of marriage. Because I love you, and I want to take care of you. I don't want to see you slaving away in a motel, or spending the rest of your life keeping house for your selfish brother. You deserve a *real* home; a nice place out on the West Coast, maybe, with one of those Jap maids. Of course, we'll probably want to do a lot of travelling — Mexico, Hawaii, places like that—"

Lou poured it on now, and she took it all in; she wanted to take it all in. She didn't care about the lousy *toupee* any more. He could have told her he had a wooden leg and a truss and she'd still buy the deal. So he put the deal to her now.

"No sense starting any family argument," he said. "I don't want to see you quarreling with your brother. And that's just the way it's going to be, if you go back and tell him what I said. Nothing's liable to make him change his mind. He'll have to see for himself that things are different. We'll just write him a postcard from Miami Beach."

"Miami Beach?"

"Sure. Isn't that a nice place for a honeymoon?" Lou squeezed her close. "I had the plans all made before Bert showed up—even wired for reservations. I figured we'd get married Saturday and take off right away. Spend a couple of weeks just lying around in the sun—maybe fly over to Havana for a while, if you like." He squeezed harder. "But now I've got an even better idea. You and I aren't going to get married here at all. We're going to elope—tomorrow."

"Elope?"

"That's right, honey. You aren't going to go through any big scene with that brother of yours."

"But I'd have to give notice—there's a million and one things to do."

"Never mind. I want you to go back to your place and pack up, now. We'll take the morning plane out." Lou smiled at her. "From now on, this is my show."

The rest was easy. There wasn't even any hitch about the money; Bessie was the one who suggested she go down and draw it out of the bank before they took off.

Lou stuck close to her all the way. Once she'd gotten out of the motel without her brother seeing her, his troubles were over.

The following afternoon they were in Miami. Bessie had a fresh corsage and Lou had the eight grand in a cashier's check nestling in his wallet. Right after they were married Bessie wanted him to open a joint account.

Lou knew his women, all right. He played it very straight. He never touched Bessie, never made a suggestion. They took their tests, waited, and went in the fol-

lowing week for a civil ceremony.

Apparently Bert Jackson hadn't been able to figure out their destination, because he never followed them. Lou took the precaution of registering under a phoney name, but just the same he sweated it out until the marriage was performed. He didn't want that wise little creep to stick his nose in and queer the pitch.

After the ring was on Bessie's finger he allowed her to send two wires. One went to the motel in Daytona and the other to her brother's regular address in Newark, just in case he'd returned home.

A few days later, he even let Bessie sit down and write a long letter to Bert Jackson at the Newark address, telling him how happy she was and inviting him to pay them a visit when they got established in a place of their own.

Again Lou sweated, worrying about the offchance of having the guy suddenly show up to spoil the honeymoon. But he must have decided he was licked, because he didn't answer and he didn't appear.

So the honeymoon wasn't spoiled, after all.

It was nice to put up at a swanky joint, eat at the best places, and do the town at night. Of course, steering this old tub around was no picnic, but Lou knew how to handle her. He kept pouring drinks and it worked. Bessie wasn't used to liquor, but she got so she liked it. Lou tried to keep her stoned at night and he saw to it that she attracted attention when he dragged her back to the hotel. This all cost dough, but it was necessary. Every day was eating further into that eight grand, and yet he had to stall for time.

He waited until well into the second week before he sat down and sent off his own letter to Bert Jackson. It was a little masterpiece—it ought to be, because he rewrote it four times, one morning while Bessie slept off a hangover. Let bygones be bygones, forgive and forget, we're all one family now—that sort of thing. And then the plant, just a touch, about how Bessie was very happy but she had to take things a little easy on account of the old ticker.

That was enough for Bert, Lou figured. The next step was to spread the word around. Whenever Bessie slept late, he made a point of showing up in the lobby downstairs. He told the maids and Room Service not to disturb his wife, because she wasn't well.

Once, as a master-stroke, he even managed to give *her* the needle. During the course of a particularly bad hangover he convinced her that she should see the house physician.

He was a young squirt who didn't know his stethescope from second base. All he did was examine her and give her a couple

of pills. But his visit gave Lou a chance to take him aside privately and put on the old act.

"I don't know what to think, Doc." he said. "It scares me, sometimes. We're just married, you know—and I never realized that she—well—" He allowed his voice to trail off in embarrassment. "Don't you have some kind of pills that sort of take away the craving?"

The house physician gave him some advice on how to keep Bessie away from the sauce and even promised to come back again and talk to her about it when she felt better.

Lou thanked him, and then he went to work.

He got the digitalis at a drug store way out in the sticks. As a matter of fact, *he* didn't get it; Luis Manuel got it. Luis Manuel, the baldheaded little guy, wearing big horn-rims and driving a rented car.

But it was Lou Manning who arranged for the Saturday night binge at the nitery down the street.

And it was Lou Manning who brought Bessie back to the hotel, stewed to the eyeballs, and poured her a nightcap when she got to bed.

It was Lou Manning who gave her the digitalis, got rid of the bottle, cleaned and refilled the glass, and saw that she put her own fingerprints all over it again.

It was Lou Manning who ran the shower to cover up the sound of her groans.

Bessie didn't have to do anything but die.

When she stopped threshing around and her eyeballs rolled up and the gasping ceased, he knew it was safe to call the house physician.

There were no problems.

He told his story about the sudden attack, and the death certificate read "cardiac collapse during acute gastro-enteritis." Everybody was very sorry, and the cemetery lot was easy to buy, and nobody came to the funeral to comment on the cheap casket or the lack of flowers. That's because, in his grief and confusion, Lou forgot to wire Bert Jackson until the day before the funeral. So Bert couldn't possibly have made it down there in time.

But those things happen and must be forgiven. And it was perfectly understandable that the stricken husband wouldn't stay at the hotel any longer. If Bert Jackson did show up later, they could explain it to him.

As for Lou Manning, he didn't wait around. The day after Bessie was planted he checked out. Fortunately, he'd never quite managed to open a joint account, and he had over seven thousand of Bessie's money in cash. He bought himself a ticket to Havana.

He figured he deserved a little vacation.

There was a girl named Encarnacion and there was a thing called a Silver Punch and there was a gambling casino. Lou Manning didn't quite know where to place the blame. All he knew was that a month later he was back in New York with less than a grand left in his pocket.

He'd blown the wad. It was a damned fool thing to have done, but there it was.

But easy come, easy go. And there was always plenty more where that came from.

Lou checked into a small East Side hotel, went around to a cheap printer and got some letterheads made up, and batted out another inquiry to the Romance Club. He enclosed the usual fee.

After that, there was nothing else to do but wait.

It took several weeks for the first replies to come in, and at first nothing looked good. Some Polack waitress out in Montana with two kids—a dame in Chicago who claimed she owned a big estate but who wrote on cheap stationery which gave her away immediately as a phoney. Lou Manning could smell a phoney a thousand miles away.

So he sweated it out, cutting down his expenses to thirty bucks a week. Sooner or later the right one would come along. He'd been through this before. There was nothing to worry about, because when the right one came, he'd handle her. Lou knew women.

Sure enough, he got a break.

The break's name was Mrs. Amy Goodrich.

She said she was forty-one and sent a picture to prove it, but that meant nothing. Usually they cut about fifteen years off their ages and used an old snapshot. Lou Manning didn't care about that, one way or another.

What interested him was the eight-unit apartment building left to her by her late husband. It was too much for her to handle alone; she had no relatives and few close friends. That's why she had written to the Romance Club, she told him in her second letter. It made her feel just a wee bit foolish and ashamed, but she needed a friend.

Lou Manning liked her letters. They were neatly typed and the grammar was good but not *too* good — which was perfect, because you had to watch out for the brainy types. Lou liked her setup, too. There was just one thing wrong with the deal, though.

Mrs. Amy Goodrich lived in Miami Beach.

Normally, he'd have arranged to rush right down, but this was a special problem. Miami Beach was entirely too close to Miami.

So he tried to work the angles. He wrote, assuring her that he was the friendly type. And it just

so happened that he had some experience in property management and real estate. As soon as he disposed of his own holdings in New York, he was going to California. Right now he couldn't possibly get away until the deal was cleaned up. But why didn't she try to sell her place and fly into town for a visit so that they could get better acquainted?

Of course he didn't lay it on the line cold like that, and he didn't crowd all his suggestions in at once. There was plenty of padding and sweet-talk in between, and he managed to stretch his proposal over four letters. He built up a very convincing picture of himself as a well-to-do widower, and he was really in there pitching at the end. He had to, because he was down to a little over six hundred dollars.

But Amy Goodrich wouldn't buy—or, rather, she wouldn't sell. Lou realized, too late, that he'd outsmarted himself.

If he had experience in handling property (she wrote) then why didn't he come down and pay *her* a visit? Maybe he could help handle the deal and get a better price. Or perhaps he might decide it would be a good idea to keep the apartments, which really brought high rentals in season. She was telling him these things assuming that she could trust him and that he was serious about his intentions. Of course, there was only one way to find out and that was to get acquainted personally. His letters sounded charming, but a lonely woman has to be sure of things before she entrusts her future to a stranger. She hoped they'd be compatible, because she didn't want to spend the rest of her life alone. And she was relieved to find out that he was fairly well-off too. That's what had kept her away from the men she met in Miami Beach—they all seemed to be broke and out after her money. Couldn't he just take a week off for a flying visit?

Lou Manning thought it over. He weighed the possible risks, and found them negligible. He inspected his bankroll. That was negligible, too.

Then he sent the wire and took off for Miami Beach.

Fortunately, the season was over and he was able to get a decent break at a nice hotel. A week there would be all he could possibly afford, but a week might be long enough. It *had* to be long enough.

The minute he got into his room he phoned Mrs. Goodrich at the number she'd given him in her last letter. Somebody answered—sounded like the maid—and said Mrs. Goodrich was out at the real estate office, but she'd left word for him to meet her if he called. She'd be in the dining room of the Savoy, at one. Did he know where the Savoy was, in Miami?

Lou knew where the Savoy was, all right. Less than three blocks away from the hotel where he'd stayed with Bessie.

But what the hell. He couldn't turn chicken. Besides, there wasn't any possible risk. Bessie was dead and buried and forgotten. And Mrs. Goodrich was spending the morning at the real estate office. Did that mean she'd changed her mind and was planning to sell her property and surprise him?

He had to find out.

So Lou Manning put on a blue suit and a red tie and inspected his black mustache in the mirror. Then he rented himself a nice, shiny convertible and drove into Miami. A lot depended on making a good first impression. As he rode along he began to plan his opening remarks. By the time he entered the lobby of the Savoy he was all ready to go to work on Amy Goodrich. He glanced at his watch. One o'clock on the head. She'd be waiting for him in the dining room.

He started across the lobby towards the dining room entrance, but he never got that far. Midway in his progress he bumped into somebody, muttered, "Excuse me" and started to brush past. But a hand on his arm detained him.

Lou turned around and stared at Bert Jackson.

The little baldheaded man blinked up at him and smiled. "Here you are," he said. "I've been trying to locate you for over a month now, but they said you left town. How about that, my friend?"

"I—I was sick," Lou told him. "It was a shock and everything. Doctor told me to get away for a rest."

"Which doctor?" Bert Jackson asked. "The house physician?"

Lou stiffened. What did the creep mean, making a crack like that?

But Bert Jackson was smiling, and Lou remembered to relax. Of course her brother would talk to the house physician when he came down here. Naturally, he'd ask for details. There was nothing out of line. Jackson sounded friendly enough.

"How about a drink?" he was saying. "We ought to have a talk."

For a moment Lou was tempted to brush him off, then thought better of it. He had to find out what Bert Jackson knew and he couldn't afford to make him suspicious by running away. Amy Goodrich would wait. Lucky for him he'd met Bert while he was still alone.

So Lou nodded and then went into the bar and took a booth and talked.

There was no need to ask any leading questions, because the little man went right ahead and told

his story. He had been pretty upset when Bessie had run off with Lou that way in Daytona Beach, but when she wrote and assured him of her happiness he got over it. He'd received the letter in Newark, where he was working a few club bookings with the old act. Funny thing, he'd run into one of the Six Brown Brothers—did Lou by any chance happen to remember them?

Lou didn't remember the Six Brown Brothers, and he wasn't interested. He prodded Bert Jackson to continue.

"I was out of town when your wire came," Bert said, "and when I got back I knew the funeral must have been held already. But I called the hotel. You must have known I would—why didn't you stick around?"

"I was too upset," Lou answered. "Like I told you. I had to get away."

"You should have left me a forwarding address."

"I didn't know where I'd be. I meant to write you again when I got settled down. Just arrived in town today." He paused, wondering whether or not to ask the question. But he had to.

"How come you're here?"

Bert Jackson shrugged. "Got myself a booking. Three weeks, maybe four. I've been in town a week already."

That sounded logical. Lou decided it was safe for him to turn on the grief. A nice little act—bereaved husband describes his wife's last hours to her brother.

But Bert was sparing him the trouble. "Naturally, I did a little checking up," he was saying. "I talked to the people at the hotel, and to the doctor you called in for Bessie. But I didn't find out until today that you'd gone to Havana."

Lou took a big gulp of his drink. All at once he felt very cold.

"Nice place to rest up," Bert continued. "And even if you had a shock, there was Bessie's money to cushion it for you."

"Bessie's money? But she didn't have—"

"Eight thousand dollars," Bert Jackson said, nodding. "Oh, I knew all about her bank account, my friend. And so did you. You came down here with Bessie and her eight thousand dollars. Now Bessie is gone, and I suppose the money is gone, too."

"What business is that of yours?"

"I'm not concerned with the money. It's Bessie I'm thinking about." Bert Jackson wasn't smiling now. He leaned forward, one slim white hand tapping the table. "What really happened to my sister? Tell me."

"But you know what happened. She had this attack—"

Bert sighed. "Never mind. I didn't think you'd really level with me, anyway."

"I *am* leveling with you! What do you *want* me to tell you?"

"Just the truth. Did she really have a heart attack, Lou? Or—"

Lou took a deep breath. "Look here, I don't have to sit here and take this kind of stuff from you. You say you talked to the people at the hotel. You talked to her doctor. They'll back me up."

Bert Jackson sighed again. "Yes. They already have. As far as the record goes, you're clean. And being her husband, I suppose you're entitled to the money, too. But I know what you were up to, Lou. Romancing a fat, foolish middle-aged woman, giving her the big rush act—"

Lou Manning knew that the crisis was over. Bert didn't really have a leg to stand on; he'd just admitted as much. So he could relax and go into his pitch again.

"You've got me all wrong, Bert. I loved her, and she loved me. She was happy, but you wouldn't understand that. You're a bachelor—you don't know anything about women—"

Now what in hell had he said wrong? It must have been something, because Bert Jackson wasn't reacting properly.

The little man was laughing.

It wasn't a mirthful laugh, but it was genuine. Bert Jackson's shoulders shook. He stood up and gazed down at Lou, and there was no mistaking the hatred that shone in his eyes. But he laughed.

"All right," he said. "All right, Lou. Have it your way."

Then he was gone.

Lou sat there and finished his drink. He had a lot of thinking to do. The creep suspected him. He'd snooped around and gotten nowhere. That was plain enough, because there'd been no threat of calling in the law. But Bert suspected him and he was an enemy. And why had he laughed? Lou had told him the truth—at least about the way Bessie had felt. She *did* love him, she *was* happy with him, until the end. Why had Bert laughed?

Lou Manning didn't know. All he knew was that he must work fast. Sew up Amy Goodrich and get out of town, quickly, before Bert could get hold of him again. Then he'd be safe. That was the ticket—get hold of Mrs. Goodrich right now.

He glanced at his watch. Almost quarter to two. He practically ran out into the lobby and across to the dining room entrance. His eyes scanned the faces of the late diners. Young couples, old couples, three or four singles, male. No solitary middle-aged woman in sight. He asked the headwaiter if he'd seen a woman sitting alone, asked if there was anyone who'd left a message for Lou Manning.

The headwaiter shook his head.

Lou went outside, got his car, and drove back to Miami Beach

and the hotel. He phoned Mrs. Goodrich from his room. This time there was no answer at all.

Something had gone wrong. Damn that little creep!

Lou hadn't eaten lunch, but he wasn't hungry. He was scared. Looking into the mirror he had to admit the truth. He was losing the old grip. He could see Lou Manning's face in the glass, but Luis Manuel showed through. And Luis Manuel, underneath the *toupee* and the hair-dye, was scared silly.

This would have to be different. Maybe meeting Bert Jackson had been a blessing in disguise—a warning. He couldn't handle any more women the way he'd handled Bessie. And maybe there *shouldn't* be any more women. Just this Amy Goodrich.

He took out her picture and stared at it again. Suppose she was only forty-one, like she said. And she had a fair-sized hunk of dough. Wasn't that enough? Couldn't he make an honest try for once, if she turned out to be halfway decent? Why not marry her and really settle down? Life could be quiet and peaceful. No more disguises, no more writing to the Romance Club, no more skulking around and narrow escapes. Yes, and no more crazy flings like that trip to Havana, either. Well, he was willing to call it quits. He might as well face the facts. He wasn't getting any younger. If he could swing it with Amy Goodrich, that would be good enough for him. He'd hit it off with her all right—after all, he knew how to make a woman happy.

Twice more he called her number, and twice more he listened to the unanswered ring. The loneliest sound in the world.

Just sitting around like that gave him the jitters worse than ever, so finally he called Room Service and had the boy bring up a pint of rye. All he needed was one or two drinks to steady his nerves. He had to have steady nerves from now on in. So he could handle this woman right.

But what had happened to her? Where was she? Why hadn't she showed up at lunch? What was going on at the real estate office?

Maybe there'd been an accident. Maybe something crazy had come up. There were all sorts of ways to foul the details in a deal like this. But the deal couldn't get fouled up. He was counting on it. It had to go through.

The drinks only made him feel worse. All at once Lou noticed the room was getting dark. He'd been sitting here for hours. Maybe he'd better not wait around. Maybe he'd better give up and get out of town while the getting was good—before that little fink got some new ideas.

Lou scowled. Why should he be afraid of a broken-down vaudeville ham? But the little man had laughed at him. Maybe

he was off his rocker. Lou knew the feeling. He was getting close to going off his rocker himself.

Well, one more phone call. Just one more. If Amy Goodrich wasn't home by now he might as well kiss her off for good.

He was just getting ready to pick up the telephone when it rang. It made him jump about a foot and his voice wasn't any steadier than his hand when he finally answered.

"Hello?"

"Hello—is this Mr. Manning —Lou? This is Amy Goodrich."

A warm contralto voice, slightly slurred.

"Yes. What happened? We were to meet for lunch."

"I know. I'm sorry about that. I'll explain everything when I see you. So much has happened—"

"Good. Where are you now?"

"Why, I'm right downstairs in the lobby. I thought we might go out for dinner, maybe have a little drink first to celebrate—"

Lou grinned. He recognized the slur in her voice now. Why, the dame was half-crocked! He hesitated another moment, then decided to chance it. "Why not come on up here for your drink?" he asked. "I happen to have the makings."

"Well, I don't know," Amy Goodrich giggled. "You think it would be all right?"

"Of course. You come right up. I'm in five-seventeen."

She hung up and Lou got to work. He switched on the side lamp, straightened the room, fetched clean glasses and scrabbled around in the dregs of the ice-bucket. Then he checked his face in the mirror. By the time he heard the knock on the door everything was ready.

Amy Goodrich stood there, swaying slightly, and blinking in the light.

Lou Manning smiled at her, and his smile was genuine—because she was genuine, too. Small, slender, her wavy brown hair gathered in a pug, and just like her photograph. Her carefully made-up face betrayed no wrinkles, and she couldn't have been any older than she claimed. Lou wasn't exactly the type to fall for the old love-at-first-sight gag, but he liked her at first sight. No doubt about that.

And when she came in, flopped into a chair without ceremony, accepted a drink with a smile and leaned back, he made a sudden decision. He'd play this one straight.

"It all happened so suddenly I don't exactly know how to begin," she was saying. "And then I've had three cocktails and this drink—" She giggled and held out her empty glass. Lou refilled it quickly.

"Anyway, I got the call this morning. From the real estate people. Remember, I told you I hadn't made any plans to sell? Well, I hadn't. But this agency

knew about the apartments and they phoned today to say they had a client who was interested in just that kind of property. They wanted me to come down right away. So I went, and left a message for you—"

Lou nodded. "I got it," he said.

"I'm dreadfully sorry I had to break our luncheon engagement," Amy Goodrich said. "But they had the client right there in the office and he insisted on taking me out and talking things over. It went on for quite a long time. Finally, though, I had to say yes."

"Yes to what?" Lou asked.

"Why, to selling the place, of course. You know what he paid me? Sixty thousand dollars. Sixty thousand dollars in cash!"

"You mean you—?"

"Oh, I don't have the money yet. But I will before the week is out. I've got the option payment and all that's left is the title-search and making out the final papers." She beamed up at him. "I guess I'm entitled to a little celebration, aren't I?"

Lou took her hand. It was warm and soft. He wasn't at all sure about that love-at-first-sight business being a gag now. Ever since he'd heard about the sixty grand he'd felt a genuine stirring of emotion. Money had always been an aphrodisiac to Lou. Just like liquor is an aphrodisiac to some women, for instance.

Holding her hand that way, the idea hit him. Why not? He had to work fast, didn't he? And the best way to do that was to cut out all the preliminaries. What he wanted to do was to sew up the deal, sew her up, and get out of town before there was any possibility of trouble with Bert Jackson.

This was a heaven-sent opportunity. Here was Amy Goodrich, already a little bit stiff. Another drink or two, she'd be a pushover. The whole thing would be a pushover. Besides, she wouldn't be hard to take. Lou knew women, and this one was desirable. He thought back, with a shudder, to all the old bats he'd known—fat, repulsive old creatures like Bessie. But Amy Goodrich was something different. She was warm and soft. And she wasn't a prude.

She giggled up at him now and pointed at the empty bottle on the table. "I've got another surprise for you," she said. "Maybe you'll be shocked. But I was hoping you'd ask me up when I called, and I didn't know if you'd have any liquor in your room, and I wanted to celebrate. So I bought this and put it in my purse."

Sure enough, she hauled out a pint of bourbon. The seal had been broken, but it was more than three-quarters full.

Lou grinned at her and accepted the bottle. He poured two stiff ones. He could stand another jolt, and it would just about take care of her.

"I'm glad you thought to bring

it," he said. "And don't worry about shocking me. You'll find out I like a drink now and then. You'll find out I like a lot of the good things in life. And might I say that you're definitely one of them?"

He raised his glass. "To our better acquaintance," he said. The bourbon tasted much stronger than the rye—it burned as it went down. But he emptied it at a gulp, hoping she'd follow suit. Then, in a few minutes, he'd make a few passes. She'd never know what hit her until it was too late to resist. Tomorrow they could apply for a license—let's see now, they could be married just about the time the money for the apartment building came through.

He started to move towards her, then noticed that she hadn't taken a drink. As he watched, she set the glass down on the bureau next to the chair.

"But you were talking about getting acquainted," she said. "Tell me something about yourself."

Lou smiled. "What do you want to know?" he began. "You've read my letters. I'm like you are. One of the lonely ones. Looking for companionship, someone I can trust, someone who understands me—"

"What's the matter?" She stood up now, staring at him. Lou bit his lip. How could she tell? He had felt the sudden cramp as he was speaking, but thought he'd concealed it. Now it came on again, worse than before. He knew he had turned pale, knew he was sweating. All at once he had to sit down on the bed. He smiled weakly.

"I'm all right," he said. The pain bored in again, stronger.

She nodded and moved closer. "Then tell me some more," she said. "About understanding. Didn't Bessie understand you?"

"Bessie?" The pain flared up again, but he ignored it. "What do you know about Bessie?"

"Everything. You married her less than two months ago, didn't you? And you took her money—"

Lou fell back on the bed. He was trying to sit up, trying to get up, but the pain pressed him down. It was a huge stone, crushing his stomach. A pointed stone that ripped and tore. And her words were ripping and tearing, worse than the pain.

"You fed her the digitalis in a drink, didn't you? Of course, nobody can prove it. They found it there when they exhumed the body, but there's no way of making certain she didn't take an overdose for herself, because of her heart. Of course, Bessie really didn't have heart trouble, did she? But you spread the word around, and now that she's dead it's just your word against a lot of suspicions. Even if you went to trial, they wouldn't have a chance at a conviction."

The pain was rising in his chest now, rising in his throat. He wanted to vomit it out, just as he was vomiting out the words.

"So Bert told you," he wheezed. "You're a friend of Bert Jackson's. He put you up to this, didn't he? He must have seen Bessie's letters from the Romance Club and figured out I'd write them again. So he hired you as bait for me. Is that it? Go ahead—tell me the rest."

"What's there to tell?" Amy Goodrich was still smiling. "You can probably figure it out. Bert ordered the body exhumed for an autopsy—a brother has the right, you know. And he checked up on you, all the way back. Then he went to the police. But the trouble is, he had no proof. No proof at all. He wasn't even sure you'd blown in the money until he met you today. Then he decided to go ahead with it."

"Go ahead with what?" Everything was blurring, but Lou gritted his teeth and forced himself to sit up. He had to hear the rest. "Go ahead with what?" he gasped.

"Why—this." Amy Goodrich pointed at the bottle of bourbon. "He wasn't going to let you get away with murder. An eye for an eye, you know. So now you've taken the digitalis too, and in a few minutes—"

"Digitalis?"

"Why not? It worked on Bessie. It will work on you. Nobody saw me come up to your room. Nobody knows about the two of us. Nobody ever will. You were drinking, you had a little spell, your heart gave out. There's a house physician in this hotel, too. He'll write out the death certificate."

"No—"

The pain was blinding. Lou tried to stand up. He tried to stand up. He tried three times, then doubled over on the bed, sobbing.

"Don't let me die—I don't want to die—get a doctor—quick—"

"Too late for that. But I've got an antidote."

"Antidote? Where is it?"

"Right here."

She was fishing in her purse again, and he could see, dimly, that she was holding a small vial in her hand.

"Give it to me—"

"Not until you confess."

"All right. I confess. I did it. Now, give it to me—"

"That isn't enough. There has to be a witness. I'll call the police."

"You can't do that."

She shrugged. "All right. Have it your way." She walked across the room.

Pain came in continuous waves now. He could just about see her, just about talk. "Where are you going?"

"To turn on the shower. In a while you'll start screaming."

"Wait—"

She had to wait, because it hit him so hard then he couldn't get the words out for a minute.

"All right. Call the cops. I'll tell—"

And she called them, and they came, and he told. He nearly passed out, twice, and they slapped his face to bring him around, but he told.

Then at the end he managed to wheeze out the rest. The dirty slut thought she'd fixed his goose, but she'd forgotten that he could pay her back.

"Don't let her get away with anything," he finished. "She's as guilty as I am. Trying to kill me with digitalis. It's in that bottle, over there." Then his voice cracked. "And now, for God's sake, give me the antidote!"

Amy Goodrich looked at the cops and shook her head.

"There is no antidote," she said.

"But there has to be—you promised—"

"There is no digitalis in the whiskey, either. All I slipped you was a Mickey Finn. That's right, the old Mickey. You're going to be sick as hell in another five minutes, and then you'll pass out. But that's all right. They'll take care of you fine when you wake up again. You're going to be right in shape for the trial."

One of the cops helped Lou get to the bathroom. Amy was right; he was very sick indeed. When he got back they were waiting to take him downstairs.

"I'm afraid we'll have to ask you to come along too," the cop said. "We'll need a complete explanation of all this, Mrs. Goodrich."

"Whatever you say," she answered.

Lou stared at her. She was a fine figure of a woman. For a moment he felt a twinge of regret and somehow it was worse than the physical pain. If only she had been content to let things ride! They could have been happy together. He knew that he could have been happy with a woman like her. But she had to turn out to be a dirty double-crosser, a friend of Bert's.

Suddenly she turned to Lou and began to laugh, and sick as he was, he recognized the sound.

"All right," she said, softly. "I'm sorry. But I had to do it this way. A long shot, but I figured it was the only chance. And it worked." She nodded at Lou soberly. "And I couldn't help laughing when I thought about this noon."

Slowly, Mrs. Goodrich removed the brown wig and revealed the bald head beneath. And the laughter came again. "Telling me you knew all about women and I didn't. Me, Bert Jackson—one of the best female impersonators in the business!"

built up area

by . . . Michael Hervey

Were those shacks a town? Why not? There were even smaller "towns" down the road — smaller and legal!

So YOU'VE never heard of Marrville? I'm not surprised, it's a new town: been in existence just a few weeks. I created it. Yeah, that's right, and what's more I named it after myself. Tommy Marr, that's my moniker. I got the idea while I was travelling to a place called Wilson down in North Carolina. That's where I was born, in case you're interested.

I was in a hurry, so I kept up a steady seventy miles per hour all the way. I hadn't visited those parts for close on twenty years, and I was surprised at the number of small burgs that had cropped up while I'd been away. The highway was simply pock-marked with 'em. They all had their speed limit signs up, but of course I ignored 'em.

Well, to cut a long story into digestible chunks, a speed cop booked me just before I got to Enfield.

"You went through North Hill at seventy-three miles an hour," he said, producing his little black book.

"Through *where*?" I tosses back at him.

Michael Hervey, Australian writer and jurist, returns with this short-short laid in the Tarheel country, here in the States. We've all heard about communities such as Marrville. It is not surprising that the possibilities of this way of life have become appreciated—even in Australia.

"North Hill," he repeats obligingly, handing me a ticket.

"You've made a mistake. I've never even heard of the hick town, let alone passed through it," I told him.

"Don't argue, Bud," he says wearily. "I was right on your tail when you shot through the place. It's a couple of miles this side of Weldon—"

"You mean those two shacks by the roadside constitute a town?" I gapes at him.

"Sure, why not," he yawns. "In case you're interested, there's an even smaller burg down the road, so watch your step!"

He wasn't foolin' either! West Hill, five miles down the road, consisted of one shack! I kept well within the speed limit all the way to Wilson—I wasn't aimin' to be caught twice, you understand. Meantime my brain is working overtime. I can't help feeling that there must be an angle in it somewhere.

As soon as I gets back to New York I drops in to see a mouthpiece I know. He tells me there's nothing to stop me creating a so-called town if I feel like it, providing the place is populated.

"What's the smallest amount of population I'm allowed?" I asks him.

"Well, I don't suppose you could go any lower than one," he grins. "What's on your mind?"

"Supposing I'm the only citizen of this new town—there'd be nothing to stop me appointing myself mayor, is that right?"

"No . . . I suppose not . . ."

"And as mayor I'd be within my legal rights to enforce a speed limit through the town, right?"

"Certainly. There could be no disputing—"

"That's all I wanted to know," I grinned, making tracks for the door.

And that's how Marrville came into existence. I figured somewhere along Route 9 would be as good a place as any to get started. I found just the shack I was looking for not far from Manahawkin. It was slap-bang alongside the highway.

The guy who owned the dump thought I was nuts when I offered to buy the place. Especially when I paid twice what it was worth. Then I made the necessary application to name the place Marrville, after which I appointed myself mayor and Chief of Police.

Having stuck up a couple of small speed limit signs, I bought myself a speed-cop's outfit and one of those big motorcycles. I was now ready for business.

As you know Highway 9 carries practically all the Atlantic City traffic from New York. Naturally everybody burns up the road going both ways. I couldn't stop them fast enough. For every one I booked, I had to let a dozen go by. Even so, I didn't

do too badly. I reckon I must have averaged at least five hundred bucks a day. I made 'em pay a fifteen dollar fine on the spot.

It was one sweet racket and no mistake! For once I had the law on my side! I don't mind tellin' you it felt pretty good. Needless to say, I didn't make a sucker of myself by trying to book any of the police cars that came roarin' through from time to time.

Business was so good I was almost tempted to expand the police force, but although it would have meant a bigger daily take, there was always the risk of some wise guy trying to queer my pitch, so I carried on alone.

I've never grafted so hard in all my life—not even when I was at Sing Sing. I was at it seven days a week; from the crack of dawn to the early hours of the following morning. I used to begrudge going to sleep. I used to lie in bed in a half dead condition countin' the cars go by, and saying to myself: "There goes another fifteen bucks I could have had!"

All the time I was rakin' in the dough I had a feelin' that it was much too good to last. It was too easy, if you know what I mean?

That feelin' paid off early this morning. A big black sedan came tearin' through Marrville round about six. Naturally I gave chase. How was I to know that Luigi Trattori was on board with five of his hoods, and that they had just broken out of jail?

The rest you know. They filled me with so much lead I rattled when they carried me towards the ambulance . . . They tell me I'm sinkin' fast . . . Which reminds me, what paper did you say you were from? The Globe. Okay, well just you see they spell my name right when they print my obituary — it's spelt with two r's . . .

HOLDUP

It seems a customer was waiting in line in front of a teller's window in a small country bank. The guard wandered over to pass the time.

"Is that a real gun?" asked the customer.

"You bet it is!"

"My, my. And are those real bullets?"

"No, they're just blanks."

At this the customer pulled out his own gun and said, smiling unpleasantly,—"My gun *has* real bullets in it! Take it easy! This is a holdup!"

a sound of ancient flames

by . . . Thomas N. Scortia

She had to live with these memories during the years to come—memories that made her cry out, as if in pain.

MISS ABIGAIL who worked as a secretary in a local insurance office and was very precise in her ways, pursed her lips primly and said, "Really, Mrs. Trimbull, you'll have to do something about Mrs. Stanley. I haven't had a wink of sleep in weeks."

Mrs. Trimbull smoothed the front panel of her faded print dress with red hands and said, "The poor woman . . ."

"Poor indeed," Miss Abigail snorted. "Why doesn't she see a doctor?"

"Maybe she doesn't have the money."

"Doesn't she pay her rent on time?" Miss Abigail asked blandly, leaning forward with sudden interest.

"Right on the day," Mrs. Trimbull assured her. "Six dollars and fifty cents. She gets a check every month."

"Well, I certainly won't continue with her crying and moaning every night. Can't you move her down the hall to that vacant room?"

"Well," Mrs. Trimbull said, "that's Johnny's room and I always like to keep it ready for the

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Thomas N. Scortia, in addition to holding down an extremely responsible job in his profession, has been writing on rocketry recently, also for the men's magazines, and has just completed a whodunit, based on his experiences with the Army Chemical Corps at Dugway Proving Ground, Utah.

times when he comes home on leave from the Navy."

Miss Abigail sighed. "Well, something's got to be done. The way she carries on is a fright, crying out like that and then sobbing and moaning. What makes it worse is she either pulls the covers over her head or presses her face into the pillows."

"How do you know that?"

"Because it's muffled, the noise, that is. That's what makes it so bad. It's just on the edge of your hearing and she doesn't stop until it's nearly morning."

"Well, I'll see if I can't talk to her," Mrs. Trimbull said. "Perhaps I can give her one of my sedatives."

"Anything, anything," Miss Abigail exclaimed, throwing up her hands. "Only it's got to stop. It's driving me to a distraction."

After dinner that evening, Mrs. Trimbull began to clear the table while Miss Abigail retired to the parlor to read the evening paper. Mrs. Trimbull was emptying the gravy boat into the garbage pail when the kitchen door swung open and Mrs. Stanley pushed through with several plates in her hands.

"I hope you don't mind," she apologized. "I was lonely and I thought I might help in the kitchen."

"Thank you," Mrs. Trimbull said as she began to pour hot water from the battered teakettle into the granite dishpan.

"I'll dry if you like," Mrs. Stanley offered.

The two women worked silently side by side for some moments and finally Mrs. Trimbull said, "I wonder if you'd mind changing rooms with Johnny."

"It's really much nicer than your own," she added hastily.

"Oh, it is," Mrs. Stanley admitted. A sudden worried frown creased her wrinkled forehead. "But I hope there isn't . . . I mean, have I done anything?" She brushed a thin lock of gray hair from her eyes.

Mrs. Trimbull placed the meat platter she was washing on the drain board of the sink and dried her soapy hands on the dish towel. "Now, please don't be offended," she said.

"Oh, no, but something's the matter, isn't it?"

"Well," Mrs. Trimbull said, wondering how she had suddenly found herself in such an awkward position, "Miss Abigail . . . that is, you've been having nightmares for several weeks." Mrs. Trimbull stopped at the sudden flicker of fear in the other woman's eyes. "I mean, I thought you might sleep better in another room," she finished lamely.

"Oh, yes, yes, of course," Mrs. Stanley said. "I wouldn't want to disturb anyone. Besides," she smiled, "the other room is nicer, as you say. There's, oh, I suppose you'd say an air of the young about it."

"A young lion," Mrs. Trimbull laughed.

"Johnny's a fine boy from what they tell me. I envy you."

"Don't you have any children?" Mrs. Trimbull asked.

"No, no," Mrs. Stanley said nervously, biting her lips. "I did want children but . . ."

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Trimbull said. "I didn't stop to think that your husband might be dead."

"No," Mrs. Stanley said, twisting the dishcloth in her hand, "he's still alive. I hear from him sometimes."

Mrs. Trimbull flushed. "I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to pry."

The next day which was Saturday Mrs. Trimbull helped Mrs. Stanley move to her new room. They were finished just after eleven and she left Mrs. Stanley arranging her clothing. As she descended the stairs, she heard the front door open and close. She paused on the bottom landing and saw Miss Abigail, holding a business envelope up to the light from frosted glass of the front door.

Mrs. Trimbull coughed loudly and Miss Abigail started guiltily.

"I was just trying to make out who this was addressed to," she explained. Mrs. Trimbull took the letter from her hand.

"Yes," she said, "elite type is a little difficult to read at times."

"My eyes, you know," Miss Abigail said, coloring.

"Of course," Mrs. Trimbull said, noticing that the letter was addressed to Mrs. Stanley. The return address said: "Lloyd and Christman, Attorneys at Law."

"I suppose it's Mrs. Stanley's check," Mrs. Trimbull said. "She gets a letter like this every month."

"Oh," Miss Abigail said and looked very disappointed as she started for the stairs.

"I think you'll sleep well tonight," Mrs. Trimbull called after her. "I've moved Mrs. Stanley to Johnny's room."

"Thank goodness," Miss Abigail breathed.

When Mrs. Stanley came down for lunch, Mrs. Trimbull gave her the letter and she said, "I'm glad to get this. There are one or two little things I must buy. My husband's birthday is next week." She smiled self-consciously. "Of course, the income from my father's trust fund is the only income I have and I can't afford anything really grand."

"I'm going shopping Monday," Mrs. Trimbull said. "Perhaps you'd like to go along."

"I'd like that very much," Mrs. Stanley said.

That night Mrs. Trimbull awoke with the faint sound of crying in her ears. In the darkness of her room it was some moments before she identified the source and then she realized that the sound was coming from overhead, from Johnny's room which

was directly above hers. She lay awake for several hours thereafter as the woman in the room above tossed on her bed and the sound of protesting springs mingled with faint sobs.

The next morning after breakfast she managed to find Mrs. Stanley alone in the parlor and said, "Mrs. Stanley, couldn't I make an appointment for you with my doctor?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Stanley protested. "No, thank you. I'm sure I'll be all right."

"Perhaps if you had something to help you sleep?"

"But that takes a doctor's prescription."

"I have some tablets from the time my arthritis was so bad," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"Oh, would you?"

"I'll be right back," Mrs. Trimbull said and went into the kitchen. In the cabinet she found the small green bottle, labeled "Phenobarbital USP," with the scored white tablets and returned to the living room.

"Johnny sent me these from the Navy," she said. "He's a pharmacist's mate, you know. Now, don't take more than two or they'll make you feel too loggy the next day."

Mrs. Stanley inspected the bottle. "Don't you want to keep some of these for yourself?" she asked.

"No," Mrs. Trimbull said. "I sleep quite well."

That night Mrs. Trimbull enjoyed an undisturbed sleep and the next morning which was Monday, Mrs. Stanley appeared at breakfast, looking very refreshed.

"Oh, my," she said, "I did have such a good sleep last night."

"So did I," Miss Abigail said pointedly between precise bites of toast.

Mrs. Trimbull and Mrs. Stanley went shopping at nine and Mrs. Stanley bought a man's shaving set and a writing kit. When Mrs. Trimbull suggested a necktie, Mrs. Stanley shook her head and said,

"No, he wouldn't have a use for one."

Even though Miss Abigail usually ate downtown on weekdays, they returned before twelve because Mrs. Stanley complained of being fatigued.

"Perhaps you'd better take only half a tablet tonight," Mrs. Trimbull suggested as she fixed them a light lunch of milk and cold cuts.

"My, this is good lunch meat," Mrs. Stanley said after they had been sitting in silence for awhile. "When I was a girl, we used to get such wonderful head cheese from our farm in the country." When Mrs. Trimbull raised her eyebrows, Mrs. Stanley said, "There was a time when my family was very well off, you know. That was before Father lost all

his money in the crash of '29. I was just twenty-six then." She smiled wistfully. "I was married just the year before the crash."

"What a shame," Mrs. Trimbull said, buttering a slice of bread.

"Of course, Father was quite against it. Mother was dead and I suppose he wanted me to stay single and be with him. He didn't like Arthur, that's my husband, at all."

"Well, after all," Mrs. Trimbull said, "you were over twenty-one."

"You'd have had to know Father," Mrs. Stanley said bitterly. "He was always deciding what was best for the people about him."

"I don't think that's right at all," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"He was impossible after Arthur and I came to live in the same house. And it was all his idea to start with . . ." Mrs. Stanley compressed her lips tightly for a moment and then laughed.

"Well, enough of that," she said, "May I have some more milk?"

That night Mrs. Trimbull was again awakened by the same distant sobs and once she heard Mrs. Stanley cry out as though in pain. When the sobs continued without abating, Mrs. Trimbull donned her robe and found her way up the darkened steps. In the shadowed hall outside Mrs. Stanley's room, she paused and knocked. She heard the sobs suddenly stifled and after a moment Mrs. Stanley opened the door, her nightgowned figure a foggy white in the half-darkness.

"Is there anything I can do?" Mrs. Trimbull whispered.

"I . . . I had a nightmare," Mrs. Stanley said.

"May I come in?"

The woman paused uncertainly for a moment and then drew back. Mrs. Trimbull turned on the wall light and found the green bottle on the bedstand together with a half-empty glass of water.

"Here," she said, opening the bottle, "you'd better take another."

"But I took half of a one an hour ago."

"Then try another," Mrs. Trimbull insisted. "I can't bear to think of you lying awake up here."

Mrs. Stanley swallowed the sedative and stretched out on the bed. "You're really very nice to me," she said, "and I'm such a bother."

"My dear," Mrs. Trimbull said as she sat down in the chair beside the bed and gathered the folds of her robe about her, "I know what it is to be very lonely."

Mrs. Stanley nodded sleepily. "It is terrible," she said. "You're the first person in years that I've ever really talked to. Ever since Father died in that terrible fire."

"Is that what the nightmares are about?" Mrs. Trimbull asked.

"Yes," Mrs. Stanley whispered sleepily. "It's always the same. I see the fire spurting from the upper windows and there's that awful sound of flames crackling and then the walls turn black and fall. They always fall so very slowly."

"Don't think about it," Mrs. Trimbull said, patting her hand.

"It's so hard not to. Arthur and I stood on the lawn and watched the house burn. There wasn't a thing we could do. Father was in the house and there wasn't a thing we could do, the house burned so fast." She was crying softly now, a peculiar kind of aspirated sob that seemed to wrack her whole body. "We lost everything we owned," she said, "and then a month later the crash took all the money Father had left."

"You say you lost your father in the fire," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"Yes," Mrs. Stanley sobbed.

"But I thought you said your father died after the crash?"

"Oh," Mrs. Stanley said, her eyes gleaming whitely in the light from the wall lamp, "I couldn't have said that."

When Mrs. Stanley finally showed signs of dropping off to sleep, Mrs. Trimbull returned to her own bed but she could not sleep. She remembered distinctly hearing Mrs. Stanley say at lunch that her father had lost everything in the crash and yet . . . When she closed her eyes, the image of a great two-storied house with clumsy mansard roof and flames jetting from the windows floated before her and she began to wish she had kept some of the sedatives. At length she found a troubled sleep.

The next day Miss Abigail came home just before noon and announced triumphantly, "I could just bust. You'll never guess. You'll just never guess."

"Guess what?" Mrs. Trimbull demanded. Sometimes Miss Abigail annoyed her.

"Our Mrs. Stanley," Miss Abigail said smugly, "only her name isn't Stanley."

"Surely, you've something better to do than carry stories like that," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"Oh, it's true. The insurance office where I work got the inquiry today. This company in the East wanted to trace Mrs. Stanley, only her name is really Clements. It seems she's the beneficiary on a life policy made out to an Arthur Stanley."

"Well, there you are."

"No, no, it's not her husband. I'm sure of that. And guess what?"

"Really," Mrs. Trimbull said, "can't you tell it without always saying, 'Guess what?'?"

"But it's so shocking," Miss Abigail said, blinking her eyes rapidly. "He was a convict. He

died of pneumonia in a prison hospital."

"Oh, really," Mrs. Trimbull said disgustedly.

"It's the truth, on my word. Died of double pneumonia. He took out the policy before he went to prison."

"Why was he in prison? Did it say?"

"No, it didn't," Miss Abigail said. "But what I wouldn't give to know."

"I'll bet you would," Mrs. Trimbull said.

At twelve a boy brought a telegram for Mrs. Stanley. After she had closed the door, Mrs. Trimbull stood, looking at the yellow envelope in her hands. There was no doubt in her mind about its contents and she wished that there was some way in which she could give it to Mrs. Stanley without actually seeing the woman. Finally she took it upstairs to her room.

When Mrs. Stanley asked her to come in, Mrs. Trimbull shook her head and muttered something about mending that she had to do. She walked down the stairs, feeling somehow a little dazed. Some time later, she thought she heard sobbing from Mrs. Stanley's room, but she tried to ignore it. Through the afternoon her thoughts returned again to the troubled woman upstairs and her nightly torments.

When Mrs. Stanley did not appear for lunch, she thought nothing of it. She spent the afternoon desultorily dusting the parlor and shortly before five she began to prepare the evening meal.

When Miss Abigail came home from work, she said, "How is Mrs. Stanley?"

"I have no idea," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"Well, you don't need to bite my head off about it."

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Trimbull said and told her about the telegram.

"Well," Miss Abigail said, "if dinner's ready, I'll call Mrs. Stanley."

When Mrs. Trimbull heard Miss Abigail cry out from upstairs, she felt for a moment as if she were going to faint. She suspected, of course, what was the matter. The sight of Mrs. Stanley's oddly hued face and the heavy rasp of her breathing when she pushed past the sobbing Miss Abigail were enough. She didn't need the evidence of the empty green bottle on the night stand.

"Shut up," she told the sobbing Miss Abigail. "Go call a doctor while I get her on her feet."

Mrs. Trimbull was literally dragging Mrs. Stanley's limp form around the room when the ambulance came. She staggered downstairs as the interne began to do things with hypodermics. Shortly thereafter she heard them carrying some sort of apparatus upstairs and a little while later

they carried Mrs. Stanley out on a stretcher.

Miss Abigail came into the parlor where she was sitting and fell into a chair.

"I knew it," she said again and again. "I knew it. I just knew it."

In due time two policemen came and asked her about the sleeping pills. The sergeant who was apparently the senior of the two said something about sedatives without a prescription, but in the end he assured her that probably nothing would come of it.

On Friday Mrs. Stanley sent word from the hospital that she would be by in the afternoon to pick up her effects. Mrs. Trimbull went to her room and began to pack the clothing in her drawers, using a pasteboard suitcase she found in the closet. She was halfway through the bottom drawer when she came across the small roll of yellowed newspaper clippings held together by a rubber band.

It was some moments before she recognized the thin, wanly pretty girl in the photographs as a younger Mrs. Stanley. There was also a photo of an elderly man with stern brows and piercing eyes and Mrs. Trimbull decided this must be Mrs. Stanley's father who had perished in the fire. There were also a number of clippings, detailing the trial of a Mr. Stanley and Mrs. Trimbull was not particularly surprised to see Mrs. Stanley or actually Miss Clements carried as a co-defendant.

She bundled the last of the effects in the drawers in a cardboard box and about an hour later Mrs. Stanley drove up in a taxi. She went upstairs with the driver and, as soon as the suitcase and the cardboard box were stored in the cab, she returned to the parlor and handed Mrs. Trimbull thirteen dollars.

"I think that takes care of what I owe you," she said tiredly.

"Yes," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"I'm awfully sorry about all the trouble."

"So am I," Mrs. Trimbull said coldly.

Mrs. Stanley started for the door and then turned. "I really am," she said, "and I'm grateful for your help." She moved her hands aimlessly.

"I'm glad you were in time," she said.

"I am, too," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"I don't know what . . ." Mrs. Stanley paused. "I . . . I'm really quite afraid of dying," she said. She started to say something else, but then she turned and walked from the room. Mrs. Trimbull heard the front door close and soon she heard the cab sputter away.

She stood quite silently for a long time.

When Miss Abigail came home, Mrs. Trimbull told her that Mrs. Stanley had finally left.

"Thank goodness," Miss Abigail said. "Mr. Cord was on the phone, talking to the New York office and we got the whole story. This Mr. Stanley was in prison for life and your fine Mrs. Stanley . . . Did you know she had been in prison?"

"I suspected," Mrs. Trimbull said.

"And you can't guess what for," Miss Abigail said.

"Why, arson, I suppose."

"How in the world did you guess?" Miss Abigail said, looking disappointed.

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what's new in crime

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Recent essays in the somewhat deadly arts — novels that you will wish to relax with, and others which reflect our times.

IN RECENT months we've seen a spate of novels with international backgrounds, reflecting our uneasy awareness of the fact that there are people on the other side of the Atlantic—and the Pacific—people with emotions astonishingly similar to ours, people with fears astonishingly similar to ours, people with hopes likewise astonishingly similar to ours. Anthony Boucher has commented on this school, which often believes that "a novel of intrigue can be sustained on one very slim plot and no counterplot," and on the profoundness of their awareness of their subject matter. We had occasion to discuss, some months ago, a novel with a Korean background that this could be said about; Mr. Boucher was commenting on a novel which located Mott Street in San Francisco's Chinatown.

John W. Vandercook, novelist, biographer (who doesn't remember BLACK MAJESTY?), war correspondent and radio commentator, is that *rara avis* among writers in this field—a distinction shared with Lawrence G. Blochman, Leslie Charteris, and a few others—

Once more comments on current mystery and suspense novels—by both British and American writers—novels which, in their variety, illustrate this column's frequent (possibly too *frequent) preachment that there is really no such thing as a simple definition of the mystery novel in these days.*

a man who *knows* the background of his novels. This is not terribly important if you accept the theory that the mystery novel is a sort of second class citizen in the world of literature, but it is *extremely* important if you keep in mind that it is precisely these novels which serve as unofficial social mirrors of our times, and that the picture they give their readers, whether distorted or clear, of the world about them, *does* influence the thinking of their readers! Nonsense? Let me murmur the word subliminal . . .

MURDER IN NEW GUINEA (Macmillan, $3.50) is perhaps not the most dramatic case in the career of the ineffable Bertram Lynch (I remember, with affection, the earlier MURDER IN TRINIDAD and MURDER IN HAITI), but Lynch, who looks anywhere from forty to sixty and is "the most ordinary looking man" Professor Robert Deane has ever known, is still one of the most interesting detectives I have come across.

There is the added feature that New Guinea comes alive—in all its vividness, in all its complexity, in all its refusal to adjust to history.

By all means read John W. Vandercook's MURDER IN NEW GUINEA!

We've all met Chief Inspector Gidleigh before, a heavily built man who wears a soup-stained moustache and looks "like something between a publican and an undertaker." And we've met Mr. J. Horace, crime reporter for the *Daily Snapshot,* "short and rather thin, with rumpled red hair," always rushing in where angels fear to tread. . . . Seldon Truss' A MAN TO MATCH THE HOUR (Doubleday, $2.95) brings together these two old friends as both the Foreign Office—and the Slovenian Embassy—become interested, for somewhat different reasons, in the rather unusual activities of Michael Zichy, Third Secretary at the Slovenian Embassy in London—and also a latter-day Pimpernel.

The Slovenian authorities make understandable efforts to get hold of Zichy and ship him home, where he will have "a fair trial." A number of complications develop, to the equal distress of both Scotland Yard and the Slovenian Embassy, while the quietly romantic Mr. Horace shows considerable initiative. (Doesn't he always?) All in all, an excellent novel, recommended —particularly to those who, like this writer, sympathize with Stefan Rajk and Michael Zichy.

A number of readers have asked what on earth Raffles was eating when, on page 15 of our April issue (in Barry Perowne's RAFFLES AND SHIPMATE SADIE) Raffles and Bunny go into a faggot shop and sit down "to a good

plate apiece of faggots with all the trimmings."

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a faggot as—"Dish of liver chopped, seasoned and baked."

Bryan Peters HONG KONG KILL (Washburn, $2.95) is an interesting contrast to the Vandercook novel. Tony Brandon, of the Far East section, off to Hong Kong in connection with the Yellowknife organization's slightly less than peaceful activities there (shades of the dear dim days of the Thirties!) must "get" the head of the organization—how, is left up to him, so long as he gets results. In accomplishing his mission, against a background of riots and sudden death, he runs into (surprise!) the arrogant and beautiful Miss Lily Wang, nominal head of the Chengtu Export Corporation, and the equally beautiful but far from arrogant Susie Pereira ("Love me as I've always wanted you to love me. Completely, darling. All of me.") Don't take this too seriously.

Arthur W. Upfield continues his superb series of portraits of a side of Australia we seldom read about, in his latest Inspector Napoleon Bonaparte novel, JOURNEY TO THE HANGMAN (Doubleday, $2.95). This newest novel brings Detective-Inspector Bonaparte ("Bony," to his friends) to Daybreak, a remote village in West Australia's aborigine country, where three people have been brutally murdered. Daybreak is a one-pub town which has been created by one man and is seemingly controlled by this man of unknown age, known to every prospector and miner in Western Australia as "Melody Sam," who, in addition to other things, owns the pub where Bony goes to work as the new yardman. Bony, in addition to doing this work, tracks down a killer. Recommended!

Ruth Wadham's thoroughly literate and interesting WEEKEND IN BAGDAD (Macmillan, $3.25) is, as she points out, "a book about middle-class people, Arab and English." In this column's opinion, just as Upfield's novels are described as required reading "for American representatives headed for a 'down under' station" Ruth Wadham's novel should be required reading for people who have a tendency to generalize about events in the Near East. It is painfully true, after all, and General Kassem, most recently, has contributed to our awareness of this, that life and politics in the Near East refuse to abide by simple understandable rules. Ruth Wadham has lived in Bagdad, as is soon evident, and brings to her story an obvious—and refreshing—awareness of this reality as the police and assorted others eventually

establish the truth about the murder of a high-ranking British diplomat. Recommended.

Manning Coles is of course the creator of the Tommy Hambledon novels (those very pleasant tributes to the survival of a tradition), and of that thoroughly delightful novel, some years back, BRIEF CANDLES. Here, and somewhat in the same spirit, we are introduced in DUTY FREE (Doubleday, $3.50), to the isolated principality of Sainte-Roche in the eastern Pyrenees, to its fairy-tale way of life—and to the reality that the principality has no money. Robert Brown, valet to the Prince and Acting Foreign Minister of Sainte-Roche, proves largely responsible for a series of rather mad—and amusing—happenings. Don't miss this.

Ed McBain has attained distinction for his series of novels in which the police routine is based on established investigatory technique. KILLER'S WEDGE (Simon & Schuster, $2.95) follows this pattern, as it describes Virginia Dodge's anxiety to see Detective Steve Carella—and to kill him because she blames him for her husband's death in prison. Anyone who tries to stop her will also die. She is prepared to kill every man in the squadroom if necessary.

McBain's 87th Precinct novels are of course important in that they describe men—and not papier-mache figures—men who, recent headlines to the contrary, are the prototypes of the men who guard our and other cities. It is important to remember that they are not always plaster saints—and neither are they always the caricatures of a type loved by some writers. They are men with a duty to their neighbors, and an awareness of this duty, and in describing them—and in making the Steve Carellas of our cities come to life—Ed McBain performs a genuine service.

This must of course also be said about Ben Benson's studies (there *is* no other word, really) of the Massachusetts State Police. Benson's accurate documentation and excellent handling of police technicalities has long been acknowledged. Working closely with the Massachusetts State Police, Benson has been responsible for a series of extremely effective novels including the present, THE END OF VIOLENCE (Mill-Morrow, $2.95), once more built around young State Trooper Ralph Lindsey, here active in two separate and apparently un-related cases. Don't miss Lindsey's fight to clear his name as he and Trooper Joe Sewell, "Iron Man Sewell," are accused of brutality.

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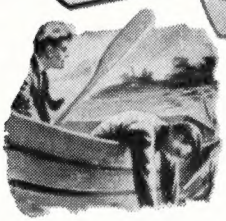

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